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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Way to Bliss*

**A**FTER every happiness comes misery; they may be far apart or near. The more advanced the soul, the more quickly does one follow the other. What we want is neither happiness nor misery. Both make us forget our true nature; both are chains—one iron, one gold; behind both is the Atman, who knows neither happiness nor misery. These are states and states must ever change; but the nature of the Soul is bliss, peace, unchanging. We have not to get it, we have it; only wash away the dross and see it.

Stand upon the Self, then only can we truly love the world. Take a very, very high stand; knowing out universal nature, we must look with perfect calmness upon all the panorama of the world. It is but baby's play, and we know that, so cannot be disturbed by it. If the mind is pleased with praise, it will be displeased with blame. All pleasures of the senses or even of the mind are evanescent but within ourselves is the one true unrelated pleasure, dependent upon nothing. It is perfectly free, it is bliss. The more our bliss is within, the more spiritual we are. The pleasure of the Self is what the world calls religion.

The internal universe, the real, is infinitely greater than the external, which is only a shadowy projection of the true one. This world is neither true nor untrue, it is the



shadow of truth. "Imagination is the gilded shadow of truth", says the poet.

We enter into creation, and then for us it becomes living. Things are dead in themselves; only we give them life, and then, like fools, we turn around and are afraid of them, or enjoy them.

Creation is not a 'making' of something, it is the struggle to regain the equilibrium, as when atoms of cork are thrown to the bottom of a pail of water and rush to rise to the top, singly or in clusters. Life is and must be accompanied by evil. A little evil is the source of life; the little wickedness that is in the world is very good; for when the balance is regained, the world will end, because sameness and destruction are one. When this world goes, good and evil go with it; but when we can transcend this world, we get rid of both good and evil and have bliss.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7.11–12.



RP - Sanjiv Goenka  
Group



# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## The Nature of Tapas

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ऋतं तपः सत्यं तपः श्रुतं तपः शान्तं तपो दमस्तपः  
शमस्तपो दानं तपो यज्ञं तपो भूर्भुवस्सुवर्ब्रह्मैतदुपास्वैतत्तपः ॥

Ritam is tapas. Truth is tapas. Understanding of the scriptures is tapas. Subduing of one's senses is tapas. Restraint of the body is tapas. Cultivation of a peaceable disposition is tapas. Giving gifts without selfish motives is tapas. Worship is tapas. The supreme Brahman has manifested himself as *bhuh*, *bhuvah*, and *suvah*. Meditate upon him; this is tapas par excellence.

(*Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 10. 1)

तपसा चीयते ब्रह्म ततोऽन्नमभिजायते ।  
अन्नात्प्राणो मनः सत्यं लोकाः कर्मसु चामृतम् ॥

Through tapas Brahman increases in size. From that is born food (the Unmanifest). From food evolves Prana (Hiranyagarbha); (thence the cosmic) mind; (thence) the five elements; (thence) the worlds; (thence) the immortality that is in the karmas.

(*Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.8)

तपसा देवा देवतामग्न आयन् तपसार्षयः सुवरन्वविन्दन् तपसा  
सपत्नान्प्राणुदामारातीस्तपसि सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितं तस्मात्तपः परमं वदन्ति ॥

By tapas performed in the beginning the gods attained godhood. By tapas we get rid of our enemies who stand in the way of our acquisitions. Everything is founded in tapas. Therefore they say tapas is the supreme.

(*Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 79.3)

# THIS MONTH

Life had defied complete conceptualization, but today's humankind is gradually understanding life's vast and multiple dimensions. **The Lessons of Life** give us a glimpse about its nature and future implications.

Scorched by innumerable miseries people forget their divine nature. An avatara, through his sadhana, love, and teachings, awakens this latent divine nature. Swami Sandarshanananda of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, throws light on **The Way of the Avatara**.



Swami Ishadhyanananda, of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters, Belur Math, participated in the Kumbha Mela of 2013 and writes about what drew millions of people to **An Amazing Phenomenon Called the Kumbha Mela**.

In **Bridging Religion and Science** Swami Samarpanananda, of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, discovers a common ground that, if acknowledged, can help religion and science work together for the common good of people.



Religion, with its ideals and commitments, always had a major role in the lives of Indians. Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya, assistant professor of Philosophy at the Raja Peary Mohan College, West Bengal, writes on Jainism's **Anuvratas as Social Ethics**.

In the eighth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda speaks on the glory of pilgrimages and service to one's parents. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office.



In **Reminiscences of Vivekananda**, Swamiji's disciple Brahmachari Jnana speaks about his impressions of his guru at Mayavati and Belur Math. These reminiscences have been translated by Swami

Chetanananda, head of the Vedanta Society of St Louis, USA, from *Smritir Aloy Swamiji*, edited by Swami Purnatmananda and published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

Shruba Mukherjee of New Delhi, a senior journalist with a reputed media company, takes **A Trip in Search of Swami Vivekananda** in three important places Swamiji first travelled during his wandering days, and she comes back refreshed by her findings.



## EDITORIAL

# *The Lessons of Life*

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL, wonderful, and full of blessedness. It is also mysterious, strange, disastrous, fleeting; it is a struggle, a discovery, an opportunity, at times dreamlike, and much more. These ideas about life, including most definitions and conceptions found in every literature, are incomplete and partial. But how can we live properly if what is so dear and the basis of our existence is not clearly known? Philosophers and many wise people have sought answers to this problem for ages. Psychologists, geneticists, neurologists, biologists, and other scientists are trying, with renewed vigour and knowledge, to understand what life is. For ages the answers about life were given through mythology. But these myths fail to pacify modern generations, who think them immature and puerile. Humankind has laboured under such raw conceptions for a long time, and the same is true about most things in the universe. Life is *prana*; it is a force that enlivens the body, senses, mind, intelligence, and ego. It is not mere breath or the pumping heart. This is the reason why, depending on the state of our bodies and minds, we speak about our conceptions of life. Most of these so-called ordinary or even poetic definitions of life are pretty much low-grade. As our minds become purer, so our conceptions of life change. The highest conceptions of life dawn when we experience life as cosmic—pulsating in the living and non-living.

In the past we thought life to be special only to humans and a few animals, birds, and reptiles. But nowadays this conception has expanded to

include all living beings down to plants, trees, and microscopic bacterial life forms. We have seen that what is called non-living things like foodstuffs, water, and air, considered inert and dead, become part of life and start pulsating in living beings. This brings insentient matter into the ambit of sentience. Life in matter may be asleep, but awakens into life at the touch of *prana*; besides, what we call food was once living beings. Thus the boundary between life and non-life is slowly being broken.

If the forces that guide inert matter become living, then the forces of life and matter cannot be dissimilar, or they cannot combine. This means that the life force also includes all material forces. This is what Swami Vivekananda taught when he said that all the forces found in nature—from electromagnetism and nuclear forces right up to human thoughts—are different manifestations of *prana*. And now we know that matter is nothing but energy in a different form, or vice versa. Hence, all matter also obeys the laws of life. It is only when this universal force is combined within the body, mind, and senses, that it becomes unique; it becomes life as we know it.

We also know that the earth teems with life. Living beings thrive in their millions and undergo their life cycles everywhere—in a drop of water, in a handful of earth, in the deepest part of the ocean, in the earth's atmosphere. This grand plan of nature is mind-boggling: at the end of a life cycle, life dies to give rise to new life. We also have life merging into life to give rise to



different forms of life, and thus the whole chain of evolution and involution is kept going.

In old mythologies we find gods creating or begetting humankind. *Prana* manifests as life wherever there is name and form. The gods and demi-gods and all the celestial beings spoken of in various scriptures also have *prana*. This proves that *prana* is confined not just to the earth and material bodies but extends into divine and semi-divine realms.


The main aspect of life is its dynamism. Equipped with senses, body, and mind, *prana* expresses itself in various ways and forms. People generally say ‘my life is my work’, or ‘my work is my life’, and so on, implying thereby that life expresses itself through karma, and that karma modifies or expresses life accordingly. Karma is a powerful factor that goes together with the life force. This is the reason why there is so much dynamism, variety, and difference in lives.

Another important aspect of the variety of life is due to the action of the *gunas*, qualities, of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, with their distinctive characteristics of calmness, activity, and lassitude, respectively. According to Indian philosophy, these *gunas* are the three constituents of Prakriti, nature, which is found in every subtle and gross object in different degrees of permutations and combinations.

It is true that old conceptions of life seem puny, and that is because we learn as we live—the longer we live, the more we learn. We often hear people say that life is the greatest teacher: ‘what life has taught me’. Yet many believe this process stops at death, and that all the lessons that we have learnt are lost forever. But this is not the case, because death cannot stop this process. Life continues in a new body and in a new place. This is what is called rebirth. The world has now almost endless knowledge, and since we cannot learn without actual experiences, we go

through the knowledge process gradually, traveling to higher and lower planes of existence till we gain perfect knowledge and attain moksha, liberation. Life is too powerful to be cut down by death or by an interval before birth.

Another important aspect of life is love. This aspect does not need elaboration, for we all feel it intensely. Love for others is actually love for life, which drives us in innumerable ways. Love also nurtures and safeguards life, and is one of the best reasons to live. Another great quality of life is that it can detect falsehood—life immediately knows what is true and false, right and wrong. We may err because of our attachments and expectations, but not for long; that is why the basis of life is truth. Life also inspires life, and when it comes to spirituality, a guru’s life is most important for a disciple. Such a pure life will infuse, as it were, a new life in a disciple and change his or her orientation permanently.

The more individual and narrow life is, the more selfish and miserable it becomes. We must make our life cosmic; that is the whole scope and goal of life. All the ethics and morality preached by every culture down the ages, without telling us clearly, were trying to fashion for humankind a universal life. All that goes into making life is ancient, and thus *prana* is also ancient. In the Upanishads *prana* is praised as ‘the oldest and greatest’ among the aggregate of bodies, senses, mind, and sense objects. *Prana* has always existed, and when we realize its essence, we go beyond death, for we find ourselves ancient, universal, and pulsating in all life. There is no absolute death for life, and all the fear of death we believed to be life’s counterpart, and which we felt shadowing us, was a delusion and ultimately false. Death and its fear always rise when life is selfish and narrow. In reality there is no death for universal life, for universal life is God. This is the way to bring meaning and worth to our lives and make it divine. 

# The Way of the Avatara

Swami Sandarshananda

**A**N AVATARA HAS *apara*, lower, and *para*, transcendental, knowledge. He has to go through the process of acquiring the first type, like we all do, but because of his tremendous mental powers, he learns things very quickly. Through those same mental powers he can also attain samadhi quickly, sometimes even as a child, and manifest higher transcendental knowledge. Swami Vivekananda calls the *apara* knowledge ‘science’, and the *para* ‘Veda’. Endowed with both *para* and *apara* knowledge the avatara becomes wise, free, beyond all confusion, and the embodiment of the spiritual laws that operate at a higher level of consciousness. These laws are called Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion, for the ‘Vedas are the only expounder of the universal religion.’<sup>1</sup> The ancient Indians studied these exceptional spiritual laws and learnt that only transcendental knowledge offers solutions to all temporal problems. They tried to shape their lives and societies according to these laws, because they knew that mere *apara* knowledge can never give one insight into the workings of the *para*. Based on such a spiritual culture and legacy Indians have worshipped the avatars, saints, and seers not only of India but of other cultures and faiths as well.

## A World Teacher

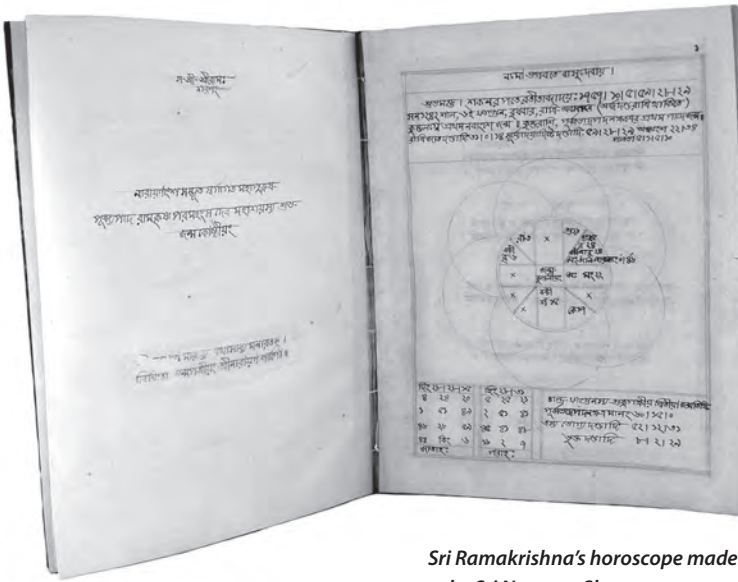
When an avatara comes various adjustments occur in the world. Through his tremendous sadhana the avatara awakens the spiritual energy latent in humankind. This awakening brings about a gradual, but sure, changes in human consciousness. The people of a particular age are

naturally drawn to the avatara born in that age, as he has worked untiringly to emancipate people from ignorance. The transcendental knowledge that an avatara possesses makes his words the scripture of the age. One achieves matchless peace by moulding one’s life according to them. Truth is constantly demonstrated in an avatara’s life and teachings, which become the values of the age.

Externally an avatara might not be recognized as something special, but internally there is a vast difference between an avatara and an ordinary human being:

Those who were previously bound, who later attain illumination by practising spiritual disciplines and pass the rest of their lives in a divine mood—they are called *jivanmukta*, or the liberated-in-life. Those who are born endowed with a special relationship with God and never become entangled with maya as ordinary human beings do are called by the scriptures *adhikarika purushas* [persons commissioned by God], *ishwarakotis* [godlike souls], or *nitya-mukta* [ever free souls]. There is yet another group of aspirants who, after achieving the non-dual experience, do not return to do good to humanity either in this life or the next—they are *jivakotis* [ordinary liberated souls] (412).

But an avatara is a class apart, as Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man.’<sup>2</sup> Or: ‘We see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation’ (726). Sri Ramakrishna’s words echo those of Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita: ‘He who thus knows truly the divine birth and actions of mine, does not get rebirth after casting off the body. He attains me, O Arjuna.’<sup>3</sup>



Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope made by Sri Narayan Sharma, 32 pages

An avatara exercises a perfect mastery over his mind from a young age. As he grows up a little, he can very easily access any of the lower samadhis. Gradually the highest *nirvikalpa* samadhi comes to him spontaneously. His mind remains poised on the border between the relative and the Absolute, from where it can switch to either side. Although his mind mostly tends to soar to the non-dual realm, he forcibly pulls it down to the mundane, because of his innate compassion for suffering humanity.

An avatara embodies all spiritual and temporal *bhavas*, moods, and is capable of dealing with all types of men, women, and children with ease. This is the one indication of his vast difference from common people. He restores faith in the indispensability of moral and spiritual values by his conduct. He is bereft of all selfishness and is unparalleled in renunciation, purity, holiness, and love. He is without ego and can lift his mind at will from his body and plunge it into samadhi. An avatara's message is catholic, cathartic, and inclusive; it is an antidote to all kinds of dogmatism and parochialism. He is pragmatic and able to absorb worldly shocks with unprecedented equanimity. He is the epitome of harmony. In short, an avatara is a world teacher who

revolutionizes, slowly and silently, every field of human aspiration.

### Confirmed Incarnation

During a critical juncture of social, political, economic, and moral turmoil some of the highly developed rishis noticed the appearance of great souls struggling to rectify things. In various ways, through art, literature, music, dance, and drama, these rishis leave accounts of the lives and teachings of such great souls. The legends and stories they have produced came

down to us as the lives of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Buddha, and so on. In recent times, when human decadence had reached its nadir and a new type of human consciousness was needed, the time was ripe for the advent of an avatara, who came in the form of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Spiritually advanced scriptural specialists visited him at Dakshineswar, after his main sadhanas were complete, and declared him to be an avatara. Besides, numerous other spiritually evolved souls also came and unequivocally expressed similar opinions. Leaders of other faiths, intellectuals, scientists, lawyers, writers, businessmen, needy people, and questionable characters as well drew solace from his company and held his dispensation in high esteem.

Sri Ramakrishna did sadhana under one of his gurus, the Bhairavi Brahmani, who was amazed to find his unusual capacity and attainments. She was convinced that he was an avatara, for the signs she noticed in him coincided with the signs of the avatars she had read about in the scriptures. She declared this in public and proposed a debate with scriptural scholars in order to prove him as an avatara. Swami Saradananda writes:

During three important periods of the Master's sadhana, three eminent spiritual pandits who



were well versed in the scriptures came to him, observed his spiritual condition, and had the opportunity to discuss their impressions. Pandit Padmalochan met the Master when he had become perfected in the Tantra sadhana; Pandit Vaishnavcharan met him when he attained success in Vaishnava Tantra; and Pandit Gauri was blessed to see the Master endowed with the divine splendour at the completion of all his sadhanas. When Padmalochan saw the Master, he said, 'I see God's presence and divine power in you.' Vaishnavcharan, in ecstasy, composed a hymn to the Master in Sanskrit and sang it to him, declaring him to be an avatar. When Gauri met the Master, he concluded: 'I see that everything I have read in the scriptures concerning high spiritual states is manifest in you. In addition, I see other exalted states that are not recorded in the scriptures. You have reached a spiritual plane that surpasses anything described in the Vedas, Vedanta, or other scriptures. You are not human. Ishwara, the source of all avatars, dwells in you.' When we study the Master's unique life and his wonderful spiritual experiences, we clearly understand that these spiritual pandits did not make their remarks out of flattery.<sup>4</sup>

To remove the last trace of doubt from Swamiji's mind Sri Ramakrishna, before leaving his body, said to him: 'O my Naren, are you not yet convinced? He who was Rama, who was Krishna, He Himself is now Ramakrishna in this body; not in your Vedantic sense [according to which each soul is potentially divine], but actually so.' Naren was dumbfounded.<sup>5</sup>

Patanjali says: 'By perceiving the impressions, [comes] the knowledge of past lives.'<sup>6</sup> Before attaining the summit of realization the aspirant remembers all his past lives. Saradananda believes that Sri Ramakrishna too remembered 'how, where, and how many times he was born, and also everything he did in every previous incarnation.'<sup>7</sup> 'Furthermore, he felt deeply that it was for a special purpose that the Divine Mother

had brought him to earth this time as the son of a poor brahmin, unlettered, and devoid of all grandeur of external powers. Although this divine mystery would be understood by few during his lifetime, the spiritual current that would be manifest to the world through his body and mind would never fail and would continue to do good to humanity for a long time' (ibid.). Saradananda explains: 'The Master realized that although he had no need of his body, it should be protected for the purpose of the divine play. ... Based on the memory of his past lives, the Master then fully realized that he was an avatar, by nature eternally pure, awakened, and free. He had assumed a body and performed austerities in order to do good to humanity by eradicating the corruption of religion in this present age' (ibid.).

Sri Ramakrishna's unheard of catholicity is conspicuous by the fact that he found immense interest and satisfaction in exploring other religions and undertaking their particular sadhanas, which were diametrically opposite to the religious tradition he was born in. But through sadhana he imbibed their true spirit, essentially reinventing them. The openness that he exhibited attracted the practitioners of all faiths. When they poured in and eventually had elevated interactions with him, they felt Sri Ramakrishna to be one of them. He asserted his divine as well as human aspects skilfully. His very close spiritual associates marked that his divine qualities and powers were manifested through the veil of a human body and a human nature. Through his human nature Sri Ramakrishna understood human difficulties and sympathized with the obvious limitations of ordinary people; through his divine powers he solved people's problems as a genuine guru. The harmony of religions he propagated was nothing contrived, rather it was a spontaneous outpouring of compassion in fulfilling a divine mission.

Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘The condition of this place (*my experience*), has gone far beyond what is recorded in the Vedas and Vedānta’ (414). There are different degrees in non-dualistic as well as dualistic experiences, but Sri Ramakrishna was not restricted to any one of them. He could rise to the non-dualistic plane one moment and descend to the ordinary reality the next. Saradananda writes: ‘Sri Ramakrishna was the foremost amongst that group of avatars because he was able to return to the realm of “I and mine” for the good of many and for teaching others, even after being completely absorbed in the nondualistic state for six months continuously’ (ibid.).

### **The Latest Avatara**

Swamiji had an energetic and inquisitive mind, which began as a sceptic and ended up with the highest realization under Sri Ramakrishna’s training. He understood that Sri Ramakrishna’s greatness defied paradigms—intellectual and other—and himself felt lost in correctly gauging the depth of Sri Ramakrishna’s power and knowledge.

However, despite his avowed reticence, he sometimes could not suppress his feelings for his dear Master. When Sri Ramakrishna transmitted the highest Advaitic experience to him by a mere touch, it struck him that this was no ordinary guru. Swamiji found for the first time a person ‘who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world.’<sup>8</sup> All of Swamiji’s scepticism was brushed aside when he saw Sri Ramakrishna actually giving religion by a mere glance or touch.

Discussing the reasons of Sri Ramakrishna’s advent in India, Swamiji says: ‘When the degraded Aryans had almost turned India, the land of religion, into a hell, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna incarnated himself to demonstrate the true religion of

the Aryan race. He made visible the unity among the innumerable sects and denominations of the Hindu religion that had cropped up throughout the country over a vast period of time.’<sup>9</sup> Sri Ramakrishna then ‘incorporated its [Hinduism’s] universal and eternal aspect in his own life to become a living example of eternal religion, which he lived before all for the good of humanity’ (ibid.).

Swamiji also says: ‘After every downfall, our revived society manifests more of its inherent and eternal perfection, and so also does the omnipresent Lord reveal Himself to a greater and greater degree in successive incarnations’ (ibid.). In ‘My Master’ Swamiji expresses: ‘Whenever this world of ours, on account of growth, on account of added circumstances, requires a new adjustment, a wave of power comes; and as a man is acting on two planes, the spiritual and the material, waves of adjustment come on both planes.’<sup>10</sup>

‘It is true that external nature is majestic, with its mountains, and oceans, and rivers, and with its infinite powers and varieties. Yet there is a more majestic internal nature of man, higher than the sun, moon, and stars, higher than this earth of ours, higher than the physical universe, transcending these little lives of ours’ (4.156). Through these words Swamiji signals that Sri Ramakrishna makes a valuable study of the internal nature.

Swamiji says that an avatara is a thoroughly original person. Sri Ramakrishna had almost no formal education, yet he was ‘so much the more natural, so much the more healthy ... so much the purer his thoughts, undiluted by drinking in the thoughts of others’ (4.167–8). Further, Swamiji states that ‘if a man throws aside the vanities of the world, we hear him called mad. But such men are the salt of the earth. Out of such madness have come the powers that have moved the world of ours, and out of such madness alone would come the powers of the future that are going to move the world’ (4.171).

Swamiji alludes to the religious harmony Sri Ramakrishna famously demonstrated as an object lesson for the world:

This was the attitude of my Master. He criticized no one. For years I lived with that man, but never did I hear those lips utter one word of condemnation for any sect. He had the same sympathy for all sects; he had found the harmony between them. A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active; the various religions represent one or the other of these types. Yet it is possible to combine all the four in one man, and this is what future humanity is going to do. That was his idea. He condemned no one, but saw the good in all (4.178).

Swamiji looks upon this contribution as the pressing need of the age. And none but an avatara can demonstrate the essential oneness of the world religions by way of actually experiencing them. That is the reason why Swamiji describes Sri Ramakrishna as *sthapakaya cha dharmasya*, establisher of religion, and *sarvadharmasvarupine*, an embodiment of all religions.

Swamiji sums up his Master thus: 'That Ramakrishna Paramahansa was God incarnate, I have not the least doubt; but then you must let people find out for themselves' (7.483). He is 'the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity, and the desire to serve mankind' (ibid). Swamiji believes that 'without studying Ramakrishna Paramahansa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the *Bhagavata* and the other Puranas' (ibid.).

Sri Ramakrishna is described as a phenomenon by scholars and thinkers. He demonstrated the highest forms of renunciation, rationality, and realization suited to the needs of modern humanity. But an avatara is much more than what scholars and thinkers believe. Sri Krishna says: 'Not knowing my supreme nature as the

Lord of all beings, people foolishly disregard me, who have taken a human body.'<sup>11</sup> Girishchandra Ghosh, who had a rebellious attitude towards life, an extremely independent nature, and a sharp intellectual acumen, found that even he could not understand Sri Ramakrishna, notwithstanding his long association with him. On being asked about Sri Ramakrishna Girish said with folded hands and choked voice: 'What can I say of Him, a fraction of whose glory even Vyasa and Valmiki failed miserably to express [in their epics]?'<sup>12</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, in his former incarnation as Sri Krishna says: 'The unintelligent, unaware of my supreme state, which is immutable and unsurpassable, think of me as the unmanifest that has become manifest. Being enveloped by yoga-maya I do not become manifest to all. This deluded world does not know me, who am birthless and undecaying.'<sup>13</sup>

(Continued on page 359)



Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope, on yellowed paper and in roll form, made by a pandit during Sri Ramakrishna's time, turned into four pieces



# Reminiscences of Vivekananda

Brahmachari Jnana

Translated by Swami Chetanananda

**M**Y FAMILY had emigrated to Munger, Bihar, from Bengal a long time ago. In 1901 my relatives selected a bride for me and finalized my marriage, but I was extremely reluctant to put the noose of marriage around my neck. To be a monk was my intention, my resolute desire. So there was only one way to save myself: by running away from home. I did so on the day before the marriage contract was made.

I had been reading the *Udbodhan* magazine, started by Swami Vivekananda, from its first year of publication. And I also read Swamiji's four yogas one after another. Prior to this I had attended one of the weekly meetings of the Ramakrishna Mission Association at 57 Ramkanta Basu Street [Balaram Mandir]. Swamiji was then in the West for the second time. I saw Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda seated on a long bench. I was impressed seeing their well-built figures. My body was also very strong like a wrestler's.

In that meeting there was a little kirtan and then a reading and discussion. I listened and then was given two *rasagollas* [a Bengali sweet] as prasad. After that I met Swami Brahmananda and learned that he was interested in trees and flowers. When he heard that I was from Munger, he said: 'The mangoes from your area are very famous. Could you collect some mango plants and send them to us?' I replied: 'Yes, mangoes of our area are good, but it is not possible for me to send those plants to you.' Swami Saradananda smiled.

I learned about the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati from an advertisement in the *Udbodhan*; it was mentioned there that brahmacharis would be trained in Mayavati, so I decided to leave home and go there. I wrote to Belur Math and received this reply: 'Yes, we had that plan, but Captain Sevier passed away suddenly [in October 1900], so the plan has been postponed. At present it has not yet been decided as to whether any brahmachari will be recruited for that place.'

In December 1900 Swamiji returned to India from the West. I also left home for Mayavati. Before my journey, I informed Belur Math that I was going there. To avoid my relatives I made several side journeys. I finally reached Tanakpur, then walked about sixty miles up to Mayavati and was allowed to stay there. Swami Swarupananda gave classes on the Bhagavadgita and the *Chandi*. I used to perform the puja in the shrine there. Swamiji arrived [at Mayavati on 3 January 1901], and there was some doubt as to whether he would allow me to stay there. One day I overheard him say: 'This boy will stay here.' I was relieved. He was not grave at all.

Before this, after I'd left home, my father had gone to Belur Math, where he had met Swamiji and informed him about my marriage. So Swamiji treated me like a friend and said with a smile: 'Tell me what happened? Did you not like the looks of the bride? Did you not like the watch, gold chain, and other gifts?' Swamiji was witty and humorous. He was very pleased by my strong body and commented: 'Very good! Generally Bengalis do not have such well-built bodies.' Swamiji stayed

at Mayavati for fifteen days. Every day there was rain [or snow], so he could not go out for a walk.

Before Swamiji's arrival I had been taking my meals with the others at the same low table upstairs. The traditional customs were not followed there, and all [including Mrs Sevier and other women] would eat sitting on the floor over a blanket. Swamiji did not like the fact that I, being a new brahmachari, should eat that way at the very beginning of my monastic life. He said to the manager: 'From tomorrow serve food to this brahmachari downstairs.' Generally he would not disturb anyone's steadfast devotion.

The hill workers of Mayavati used to address the monks as 'Swamiji' and me as 'babu'. Swamiji told them: 'No, you should not call him 'babu', address him as 'Maharaj', or 'dada' [elder brother]. From then on they would call me 'Maharaj'.

One day Mrs Sevier wanted to hear Swamiji lecture. It was only due to her request that Swamiji gave a lecture for half an hour. There were only eight or ten people present. While lecturing he spoke in a loud voice and paced back and forth, sometimes bent forward. He spoke on a general topic. It seemed that he was lecturing in front of a vast audience. During his talk he was so excited and inspired that his unique and wonderful voice shook the calm environment of the Himalayas and reverberated in all directions. This was the only time I heard Swamiji lecture. His English pronunciation was pure and perfect, just like English people.

Sometimes he would chant hymns in a deep voice and intense mood, and sometimes he would sing while walking. He said that his voice had become hoarse because of too much lecturing in the West. He asked me to memorize the Gita, the *Chandi*, and some hymns, and I did. On the first day of Swamiji's arrival at Mayavati the hill people gave him a traditional reception by performing *arati*—that is, by lighting



camphor on a plate and waving it in front of him. Observing their age-old custom he humorously remarked: 'My goodness, even a ghost wouldn't be able to bear such an *arati*—what to speak of a human being!' Finally they stopped.

One day he was shown the various rooms of the Advaita Ashrama. When he entered the shrine room, he remarked: 'I see that the old man [Sri Ramakrishna] has nicely occupied even this place.' Baburam Maharaj [Swami Premananda] had come to Mayavati earlier and encouraged the monks to perform worship and kirtan. But it was stopped because Swamiji did not advocate any ritual in Advaita Ashrama.

One day Swamiji went for a ride on a horse. It was raining. When he returned I stopped the horse by grabbing the reins and then opened and held an umbrella over his head when he got down from the horse. He was pleased and said: 'Bravo! I love to see this kind of strength.'

Swarupananda did not like that a new brahmachari would live with Swamiji. Perhaps he thought a brahmachari wouldn't be able to understand Swamiji's advanced thinking, his extraordinary conduct, his *paramahansa* state, and his exalted nature. Swarupananda considered it necessary for a newcomer to remain somewhat apart from advanced souls for that person's own development, because he might be confused.

One could see the perpetual snow of the Himalayas from the window of Swamiji's room. He enjoyed it immensely. One day he showed me the beauty of that view and said: 'Look, look. What a beautiful scene! Do you know any hymn to Shiva?' He then began to recite a hymn in his sweet melodious voice:

*Gatram bhasmasitam sitam cha  
hasitam haste kapalam sitam  
Khatvangam cha sitam sitashcha  
vrishabbah karne site kundale.  
Ganga-phena-sita jata pashupateh  
chandrah sito murdhni  
So'yam sarvasito dadatu vibhavam  
papakshayam sarvada.*<sup>1</sup>

Shiva's body is besmeared with white ashes and his smile is white. He holds a white skull in one hand and a white club in the other. His carrier is a white bull. He wears white earrings. His matted hair is covered with the white foam of the Ganga. A white crescent moon is on his forehead. May the Lord, who is all white [pure], always empower us to eradicate all sins.

While reciting this hymn Swamiji lost outer consciousness. He remained calm and motionless.

This is how I first came in contact with Swamiji in the lap of the Himalayas. I saw Swamiji with a beautiful bright complexion in Mayavati, but those who had seen Swamiji earlier said that at that time his body was quite reduced. When Swamiji was leaving Mayavati I felt depressed. I walked a couple of miles with

him, thinking that I would go with his caravan. He was carried in a palanquin and I was walking. Seeing me walking he said: 'How can you go with me now? I am not going to Belur Math at present. I shall travel to several places. You stay here. You want to be a monk. Will you obey me?' 'Of course I will obey you,' I replied. 'Well, if I ask you to jump from the edge of this high mountain to the ravine, will you do that?' 'Yes, I will.' 'Well, you will not have to do that. I tell you to go back to the Mayavati ashrama and stay there. When I return to Belur Math for the Master's festival, write to me. When I return to the Math, then you can come down from this place.' I reluctantly returned to the Mayavati ashrama.

Later I went to Belur Math. I wanted to see Swamiji in his room, but no one was allowed to enter because of his ill health. With his strong body, Niranjan Maharaj [Swami Niranjanananda] was guarding Swamiji's door. While he was talking with someone I quickly crawled between his legs and entered the room. Swamis Brahmananda and Saradananda were talking to Swamiji. As soon as I entered they said to Niranjan Maharaj with a smile: 'Well, what a wonderful guard you are! How could this boy get in?' Swamiji recognized me immediately and asked: 'Why did you leave Mayavati?' I said: 'You told me that I could come when you were at Belur Math.' He did not say anything further. While he was at Mayavati, he had asked Mrs Sevier for a picture for the shrine at Belur Math. I carried that picture. On my way the glass of the frame was broken. I was afraid Swamiji might scold me. But he was happy to have the picture and did not scold me.

I began to worship the Master in the shrine of Belur Math, and Swamiji would come there regularly for meditation. One day he initiated me, although I did not ask him to. He asked me to put on the *gerua* [ochre] cloth. I had no cloth, so Swami Shivananda gave me two pieces of



*gerua* cloth. Afterwards I put on whatever cloth was available, which was sometimes red, pink, or white. Gopal-da [Swami Advaitananda] would tease me, calling me a chameleon. Then Swamiji asked me to wear the *gerua* cloth all the time.

Towards the end of Swamiji's life, his health broke down. Before entering his room, Swami Brahmananda would ask us: 'How is his mood?' I lived with Swamiji at Belur Math for eight months before his passing. A few times I accompanied him to Calcutta for a visit or to accept an invitation. I went with him to the home of his sister, who loved him very much. Towards the end he could not eat much, but I could eat a lot. Swami Achalananda and Swami Nishchayananda received monastic vows from Swamiji at Belur Math, but he told me: 'Stay as you are, a brahmachari.'

Swamiji had immense love for the boys who came to him at Belur Math, leaving hearth and home to become monks. Once a Western devotee presented a fancy glass to Swamiji. He asked a young disciple to make orange juice in that glass, but he accidentally broke it. A senior monk loudly reprimanded the young disciple. When Swamiji heard about it, he said to the senior monk: 'When we went to the Master, he made us his own by pouring love in us. These boys have come here, leaving their families and homes. It is not right to scold them harshly. How can they stay here? A glass ends up that way; it does not die from cholera or tuberculosis.' Swamiji had limitless love and affection for those who had renounced home. He considered himself to be the servant of those who had renounced everything in the name of Sri Ramakrishna.

Once one of Swamiji's attendants at Belur Math had fever with a 104 degree Fahrenheit temperature. Swamiji called me and said: 'My son, please bring a little *charanamrita* [sanctified water] of the Master for this boy.' I smiled at this, wondering how *charanamrita* could cure the

fever. Because Swamiji had ordered me to, I was about to go to the shrine. Swamiji sensed my attitude and said: 'You can go; you will not have to bring it.' He himself went to the shrine, brought the *charanamrita*, and fed the patient—and the patient was cured.

During his last days we used to hear Swamiji chant: '*Jai Prabho, Jai Prabho!*' [Victory to the Master, Victory to the Master]; '*Ma, Ma, Ma!*' [Mother, Mother, Mother]; '*Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!*' The deep sound of his voice reverberated throughout the monastery. PB

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## Brahmachari Jnana



# A Trip in Search of Swami Vivekananda

Shruba Mukherjee

## A Station of Life

IT IS LIKE ANY OTHER railway station: people jostling with each other to board the train, porters bargaining with the passengers, mothers scolding their children for not holding their hands and straying towards vendors, elderly couples trying to negotiate their way through piles of luggage, and so on. The usual hustle and bustle, crowd and chaos, as is in most stations. Had Hathras been like this in 1888, an assistant station master would not have been able to notice a young monk with 'a devilish pair of eyes' sitting alone on a platform bench, and a story of service and devotion would have remained incomplete. The world would not have known Swami Sadananda.

It was on the platform of the Hathras Station where Swami Vivekananda met Sharatchandra Gupta, who would become his first disciple and later be known as Swami Sadananda. But a trip to Hathras revealed that there are not one but four

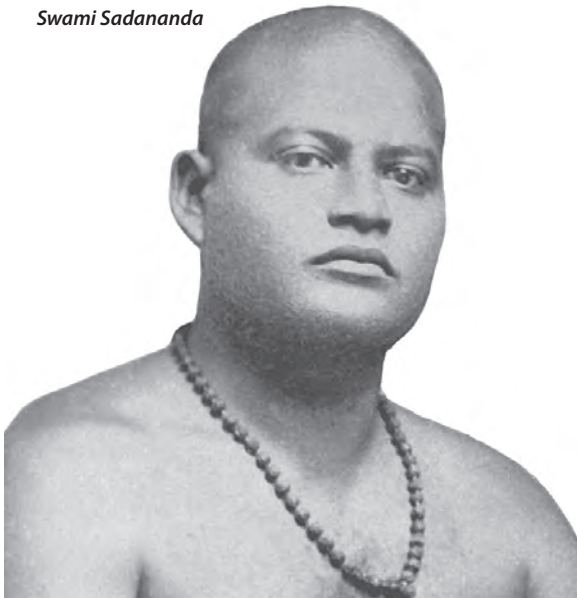
Hathras stations: Hathras City, Hathras Junction, Hathras Road, and Hathras Qila. Where did the meeting take place and how? There are two versions of how Gupta Maharaj met his Master.

According to Sister Christine, the assistant station master spotted Swamiji in a third-class compartment. 'On the train that came to Hathras one day, the young station-master of that place saw among the third class passengers, a *sadhu* of his own age with a marvellous pair of eyes. Only a few nights before, he had dreamt of these very eyes. They had haunted him ever since. He was startled and thrilled. Going up to the young Sannyasin, he begged him to leave the train and go with him to his quarters. This the wanderer did.'<sup>1</sup>

But according to another account, Swamiji was sitting on a platform bench when the assistant station master was attracted by the appearance of the young monk.

Next, we find the Swami seated in a secluded corner of Hathras railway station, on his way to Hardwar, evidently rather weary and in need of food. His figure caught the eye of the Assistant Station-master, Sharatchandra Gupta, as the latter was attending to his duties. ... After an exchange of greetings, Sharat asked, 'Swamiji, are you hungry?' The Swami replied, 'Yes, I am.' 'Then please come to my quarters,' said Sharat. The Swami asked, with the simplicity of a boy, 'But what will you give me to eat?' Promptly quoting from a Persian poem, Sharat replied, 'O beloved, you have come to my house! I shall prepare the most delicious dish for you with the flesh of my heart.' The Swami was delighted to hear this reply and accepted the invitation.'<sup>2</sup>

Swami Sadananda



Where was this meeting place, Hathras City or Junction? There was a marble plaque at the Hathras City's platform stating that Swami Vivekananda had been there. However, the plaque was destroyed during renovation work in 2009, when that line was converted from metre gauge to broad gauge.

Chandrasekhar Vimal, whose father Dr T N Vimal took the initiative in installing the plaque in 1991, says they obtained specific information from the divisional railway manager's office in Bareilly that Swamiji came to Hathras City Station. Moreover, 'They also told us that Sharatchandra Gupta was working at the Hathras City Station,' Vimal says.

Whatever might be the story, it was certain that Swamiji was going to Hardwar from Mathura. Any passenger who wants to take that route should board a train from Mathura, which in those days used to be a metre-gauge route, and then change to the broad gauge at Hathras Junction, Kailashchandra Meena, the station master of Hathras City, says. If Swamiji was supposed to change his train at Hathras Junction, what was he doing at Hathras City?

Dilip Kumar Mukherjee, a retired railway employee who has been living at Hathras since 1973, has an explanation: 'I have spent more than twenty-five years in this station and I have seen one common mistake that most of the passengers travelling for the first time on this route used to commit. They all know that they have to change trains from Hathras, and since Hathras City Station comes first, they just get down there; then they realize that their train is from the next station, Hathras Junction.'

Whether a meticulous person like Swamiji could commit the same mistake may be open to discussion, but there cannot be any

dispute over the fact that the spirit of that great mentor, who had picked up his first disciple from this nondescript railway station, is still alive among the common people there.

Ramkumar Dey, whose family has been living in Hathras for the last one hundred years, has a story to tell: 'My mother used to come and sit at the platform of Hathras City every evening. My father and elder brother passed away in quick succession, and ma was quite upset at that time. I used to accompany her and she would tell me that a great man called Swami Vivekananda came and sat here at this platform for a while. That very thought used to give her peace.'

Way back in 1991 the prominent citizens of Hathras had formed the Akhil Bharatiya Vivekananda Bharat Parikrama Samiti to spread the message of Swamiji. 'A massive procession was taken out at that time with big cut-outs of Swamiji and a replica of the Vivekananda Rock temple at Kanyakumari. There were road shows, lectures, and cultural programmes on Swamiji,' Vimal reminisces.

And the only engagement Mukherjee has now, after his retirement, is to spend his mornings and evenings at the platform. He is not keen to go back to his native place in Bankura District in West Bengal, nor does he want to shift to





Delhi, where his children are. 'How can I leave this sacred place where Swamiji had lived, albeit for a few days? Even when I was working here, I always used to become emotional by thinking that I have the good fortune of stepping on that same ground that once had got the touch of that great man,' he says.

Those who were associated with Swami Vivekananda's name had a special place in Mukherjee's heart. Many a times he had hosted in his house groups of people who were strangers to him. He did so as they were going on pilgrimage to those places where Swamiji had visited. 'Once I came across a group of youngsters from a Kolkata club who had embarked upon a journey on cycle and planned to visit those places where Swamiji had visited as a wandering monk. I met them on this platform and they told me that they were fed up with the not-so-soft chapatti—home-made Indian bread—and were dying for *dal-bhat*, rice and lentils. Immediately I recalled a similar story from Swamiji's life and took all of them to my quarters and offered them a full Bengali lunch,' he says with a hearty laugh.

It is not only the Bengalis or the so-called intellectuals in Hathras who are aware of Swami Vivekananda. Ashoke, who is an assistant in a photocopy shop at the Hathras City Station, or Devi Singh, who helps out in an eye specialist's clinic, know that Swami Vivekananda came to their town, lived there for a while, and took the station master along with him. They want a special programme to be organized at Hathras to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Swamiji and also the Indian Railways to put the plaque back on the platform. However, they think that they are not in a position to mobilize public opinion on this issue or organize something on a scale befitting the occasion. 'The lamp in the name of Swamiji is already there in our hearts, someone should light it now,' says Singh.

Perhaps, that is the least we can do to commemorate that great personality who was here to destroy the darkness of ignorance with the light of spirituality.

### **A Pipe of Brotherhood**

For Swami Vivekananda, spirituality is not something that can be found only in temples and in pilgrim centres. For him, spirituality is synonymous with love and service; it is all about breaking barriers. Perhaps this message has come out most strongly in his smoking from the pipe of a *bhanghi*—a sweeper, an outcaste—during his trip to Vrindavan.

Swamiji reached Vrindavan from Agra in August 1888. He travelled the last thirty miles on foot. About two miles away from Vrindavan he felt an urge to smoke and spotted a man smoking his pipe by the roadside. When asked for the pipe, the man said that he was a *bhanghi* and being an outcaste could not hand over his pipe to a sadhu. Swamiji, then conditioned by caste-consciousness, also did not insist and set out on his journey. After going a short distance he said to himself: 'What! I have taken the sannyasi's vow and have given up all ideas of caste, family prestige and so forth: yet I fell back into caste ideas when the man told me that he was a sweeper! And I could not smoke the pipe which he had touched! That was due to ages of habit' (1.217).

The thought made him so restless that he came back to that man and asked him to hand over his pipe. After having a good smoke he left for Vrindavan. In later days Swamiji narrated this incident to his disciples and told them: 'That incident taught me the great lesson that I should not despise anyone, but must think of all as children of the Lord' (1.218).

After so many centuries the exact location of this incident might be difficult to ascertain. But that does not mean that the lesson Swamiji

tried to impart through this incident should be forgotten. However, a visit to the Rajpur Bhangi Colony on the outskirts of Vrindavan can show that that is exactly what has happened.

The *bhangi* women have to wait for long to take water from the only tap in the locality as the Thakurs, Vaghels, and other upper castes have a priority there. 'The supply is available for a couple of hours, maybe, and they make us wait for so long that sometimes the supply stops and we have to come back with our empty pitchers,' says Neha Valmiki, a resident of Rajpur Colony. 'The upper caste women do not allow us to stand near that tap. They keep on telling us: "Stay away, keep your vessels at a distance. We do not want to go back and take another bath." They also shout at us saying: "You *bhangis*, what do you think of yourselves? Is this tap your property?"' says Nisha.

Komal, a student of class 2, does not want to go to the government primary school because children from other castes make fun of her as a *bhangi ladki*, girl. 'When a Thakur's child bullies his *bhangi* classmate, the teacher does not have any problem. But if a *bhangi* child replies back, he is punished, he is even made to stand out in the sun for hours,' says her grandmother. 'That is why we do not send our children to school. They can stay at home and learn how to rear pigs,' she says.

Mohan Upadhyay, an electrician, claims that he and his family do not believe in caste discrimination. However, once his father, a policeman, had beaten up a man black and blue along with his colleagues from the local thana<sup>3</sup>. That man's crime was that he dared to offer water to Mohan's father without disclosing that he was a Jatab—the Jatabs belong to the lower caste. 'Keeping mum about one's low caste while offering drinking water to an upper caste person is no doubt a crime, and my father cannot tolerate crime. After all, he is a policeman, keeper of law and order,' Mohan says proudly.

Some of the residents of the colony have heard about Swami Vivekananda, a 'stern-looking man wearing a saffron headgear'. They have seen his pictures and they also know that he was a 'good man' and was against 'untouchability'. But Rajender Valmiki has some more information about him: 'I know that he had smoked from a *bhangi*'s pipe and that incident took place just a stone's throw away from here, near that old Chamunda temple. But you will be surprised to know that even now they do not allow us inside the temple.'

Lalita, another resident of the colony, supports him and says: 'They take our money and whatever fruits and sweets we bring for the deity, but do not allow us inside.'

When asked about the veracity of such complaints Rajendra Prasad Pujari, the priest of the Chamunda Devi temple, admits them. '*Bhangis* and *chamars* are not allowed inside the temple,' he says. 'When Sanatan Goswami, the disciple of Sri Chaitanya, came here in search of Vrindavan, the deity took the form of a little girl and told him that Vrindavan starts from here. How can you allow the *bhangis* in such a temple? However, they are allowed to bring their offerings,' he says.

Even though we do not have a detailed account of Swamiji's activities during the rest of his stay in Vrindavan, we can safely assume that he had visited some of the old temples like Banke Bihari, Radha Raman, Nidhu Van, Gopeshwar, and also Faujdar Kunja, where Sri Ramakrishna had stayed during his visit to the holy town.

An account of Swami Vivekananda's stay in Kalababu's Kunja, a temple erected by the ancestors of Balaram Bose in Vrindavan, is given in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*: 'Here he felt as though the flood-gates of his heart were suddenly opened. The place's association with the lives of Sri Krishna and his divine consort Radha

evoked in him intense feelings of devotion. The acts of Krishna came to life for him, and he resolved to visit the environs of Vrindavan, where many of them have taken place.<sup>74</sup>

While going round the Govardhan Hill Swamiji visited the temples of Haridevji and Chakleshvar Mahadeva, Kusum Sarovar, Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. Swamiji's visit to Kusum Sarovar, a then property of the Bharatpur Kingdom now transferred to the Archaeological Survey of India, made Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda come and stay in that premises for a while. The small room in which they stayed is adjacent to the Dauji's temple, where the deity is Balaram, Sri Krishna's elder brother. It is now almost in shambles. The plaster and even the bricks are falling due to lack of renovation. There is no electricity in the shrine, which has pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji, apart from those of the two swamis.

'Now we are nobody's child. The Bharatpur Rajas are not interested, as they have handed over this property to the government. And the babus, bureaucrats, just sit on the renovation proposals,' says Mohan, the priest at the temple.

Another interesting incident happened during Swamiji's visit to Radhakunda, which is

sacred for its association with the divine consort of Sri Krishna. At this time Swamiji was wearing only a *kaupina*, loincloth. Having only one *kaupina* at that time Swamiji, while bathing, took it off, washed it, and left it to dry on the banks of the *kunda*, pond. When he came out of the water, he saw that a monkey had taken his *kaupina*. When it refused to give it back after repeated pleas, Swamiji became angry with Sri Radha and vowed that he would go into the forest and starve himself to death. As he proceeded towards the forest a man came after him with a new piece of ochre cloth and also some food. He came back to the lake and was surprised to see his *kaupina* lying there. Such incidents convinced him that God protected him always.

Though the monkeys are still a menace near Radhakunda, the forests have disappeared and there are houses surrounding the lake. The lake water has also lost its charm and pristine purity, as it is being used regularly for bathing and washing clothes. Several lawsuits have been filed by the members of the Vaishnava ashramas, who claim that the *kunda* was given to them by none other than Emperor Akbar. However, the local pandits have contested that claim of the Vaishnavites and have gone to court.

Dauji's temple at Kusum Sarovar



### A Meeting Point

Swamiji visited Ghazipur in 1890 primarily to meet Pavhari Baba, whom he described as 'a towering representation of the marvellous power born of Bhakti and Yoga' (1,230). It was very difficult to meet the sage, who used to live in seclusion and rarely come out of his place. Swamiji was so impressed with the couple of interviews he had with Pavhari Baba—the sage responded to his queries from behind



the door—that he wanted to take initiation from him.

The night before he was supposed to be initiated by Pavhari Baba, Swamiji got a vision of Sri Ramakrishna:

On the eve of the day on which I was to take initiation, I was lying on a cot thinking; and just then I saw the form of Shri Ramakrishna standing on my right, looking steadfastly at me, as if very much grieved. I had dedicated myself to him, and at the thought that I was taking another Guru I felt much ashamed and kept looking at him. Thus perhaps two or three hours passed, but no words escaped my mouth; then he disappeared all on a sudden. Seeing Shri Ramakrishna that night my mind became upset, so I postponed the idea of initiation from Pavhari Baba for the day (1.233–4).

After a couple of days Swamiji decided to try again, but had a similar vision of Thakur. He finally desisted: ‘I gave up the idea of initiation altogether, thinking that since every time I resolved on it, I was having such a vision, no good, but only harm, would come of it’ (1.234).

Even after so many decades, when one walks into Pavhari Baba’s ashrama in Kurtha village, one feels ecstatic. A couple of plaques inscribed to commemorate the meeting of Swamiji and Pavhari Baba stand as an historical evidence of that encounter between the two spiritual giants. One can actually experience a sense of bliss while visiting the presiding deity Sri Raghunathji with the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji right there in the temple at the place. With its heavy wooden door, behind which Baba used to stand and speak to Swamiji; the high-walled garden, where Baba used to sit



Painting done by Pavhari Baba

and meditate; and the inner chamber, where Baba performed his last *homa*, sacrifice, the atmosphere of the temple is intense—in the inner chamber, where Baba had his samadhi, there is also a picture of Sri Ramakrishna.

‘The people of Kurtha are blessed as such spiritual masters actually lived here,’ says Pandit Amarnath Tiwary, the chief priest, who also belongs to Pavhari Baba’s brother’s family. ‘You can travel anywhere in India, but you will not be able to find such sadhu-bhaktas, who are always willing to serve the sages and their devotees,’ he says. There are a number of huts near the ashrama, where monks from different orders regularly come and stay for months for meditation. ‘The villagers fulfil their requirements and ensure that they can continue with their spiritual practices without bothering for basic needs like food, water, and clothes,’ Tiwary says.

During his initial days in Ghazipur, Swamiji stayed with his friend Babu Satishchandra Mukherjee. His house, at the heart of the town, is in shambles now, with bricks and plaster coming out of the boundary wall and the premises full of bushes and shrubs. After staying some time in this house, Swamiji moved to Rai Bahadur Gaganchandra Roy’s house, which was later sold

off to one Yasbir Singh, who gave it on rent during the first few years and then divided the land into smaller plots and sold them off to different people. A wall has been erected around the pipal tree in Gaganbabu's house where Swamiji used to sit for hours. However, due to lack of supervision and maintenance, the place looks more like a jungle with bushes and shrubs all around.

'I have tried my best to maintain this place, where spiritual seekers can come and sit for meditation. But every time we clear up this place, it becomes a meeting ground for the anti-socials, who play cards, drink alcohol, and indulge in all sorts of inappropriate activities here,' says Anandgopal Rai, whose house is adjacent to the brick wall around the tree. Even now the only protection the place has is a rickety grill gate with an old lock, worn out due to rust.


A couple of marble plaques—now almost illegible—saying that Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore had visited Ghazipur, are inscribed on both sides of the gate. 'This is how we pay respect to these great men. The civic authorities are not interested in improving this place and the other visitors, mostly devotees, come here with folded hands, do pranams, and go away. No one does anything for preserving this place,' he rues.

Dr Ashok Kumar Chatterjee, a retired history professor in a local college, also tried his best to keep alive the memories of Swamiji in Ghazipur. 'I have lobbied hard with the local administration to put up a plaque in Satish Babu's house saying that Swami Vivekananda stayed here. But they said that there is a litigation going on and nothing can be done in this regard,' he says. Chatterjee was lucky enough to be a tenant in Gaganbabu's house, when Yasbir Singh was the landlord, and the history professor feels elated when he reminisces about those days. 'It was in 1972 when I came to Ghazipur for the first time

and became a tenant in that house at a monthly rent of 125 rupees. I was told that Swamiji used to stay in the next room. I can't tell you how I felt that time,' says Chatterjee.

He pleaded with the landlord to allow him to stay in that next room and also offered to pay a higher rent. But it was futile. 'They even sold off Swamiji's cot at 100 rupees and I could not stop it. Swamiji held lecture sessions here and people from faraway places came to listen to him. But what happened to those places now? Sometimes I feel that I have failed Swamiji, I have failed my Master,' he says as his eyes turn moist. And it is because of that sense of guilt that the professor did not leave Ghazipur to go back to his family in Allahabad after his retirement.

Should we have a sense of guilt as well? In our search for Swamiji, we have missed out the alleys and corners, villages and slums. His spirit is still alive in that grieving mother who spends hours in a nondescript railway station only because once Swamiji stepped on that platform. Swami Vivekananda is there with that octogenarian who refuses to move to a secure life with his children, as he cannot leave a place where Swamiji had once stayed. He is there in those lanes strewn with cowpat in the *bhangi* slums, where devotees are turned away from the temple on the excuse of their 'low birth'.

Let us celebrate the 150th anniversary of Swamiji from these places too. 

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# An Amazing Phenomenon Called the Kumbha Mela

Swami Ishadhyanananda



IF THERE IS any word in English capable of giving a general idea of what a Kumbha Mela is like, it is this: *incredible*. You might have visited many melas, fairs, in your lifetime, big and small, but if you visit a Kumbha Mela, like the one held at Allahabad from 14 January to 10 March 2013, you will be amazed to find that no other fair comes anywhere near it—of course, for those with a religious bent of mind.

At the Kumbha Mela ‘every day is a surprise,’ said Yuri, who had come all the way from Japan to witness the mela. And she is not the only one surprised; more than ten lakh of tourists from abroad visited the Kumbha Mela this year to experience the world’s largest human congregation.

No wonder that Harvard University sent a multidisciplinary team of fifty faculty members, staff, and researchers to study and document the phenomenon—‘The Mapping of the Kumbha Mela,’ as they call it. The ‘pop-up megacity,’ as this team prefers to refer to the Kumbha *kshetra*, place, that springs up on the dusty sands to house hundreds of thousands of sadhus and millions of their followers for fifty-five days, is a source of amazement.

To have a first-hand experience of this unique phenomenon we visited Allahabad—also called Prayag—from 7 to 11 February 2013. When we alighted at the Allahabad Railway Station, little could we imagine what lay ahead. Once



outside the station we started having a hunch of the grandeur of the mela; a huge number of passengers waited outside the station looking for a means of transport to go to the Kumbha *kshetra*. When we got a vehicle, after one hour or so, and started moving towards the camp of the Ramakrishna Mission, we could see the many temporary offices that had been set up by the government to facilitate the movement of the crowds. Even three days prior to the *shahi snan*, main bath, on Mauni Amavasya, new moon, it took us more than one hour to reach our camp, barely 4 km away from the station!

### **The Arrangements**

On the riverbank at the Sangam—the confluence of the three holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati—a city of about ten

thousand camps belonging to different akharas, ashramas, societies, and religious leaders had sprung up. The 56 sq km Kumbha City had been divided into 14 sectors, each sector having hundreds of camps. The prominent places had been allotted to the akharas and important ashramas of the monks belonging to the Dashanami Sampradaya, the ten monastic orders founded by Acharya Shankara in the eighth century CE. The very large camps of several akharas, with capacity to accommodate in one sitting thousands of people who go there to listen to religious discourses, were situated towards the fringes of the city.

The entire area had 22,000 temporary electrical poles, having two large halogen lights and four loudspeakers on each of them—the halogen lights flooded the city with a yellowish light, and

*Avenue and tents at the Kumbha Mela of 2013*





People spending the night under the trees during the Kumbha Mela of 2013

the speakers continuously announced the names of lost-and-found people. But what amazed us the most was the absence of shops in such a huge congregation! Many of us cannot imagine a mela without any shops. Business is one of the biggest motivations for holding a mela, but when it comes to the Kumbha Mela, except for a few tea vendors, one cannot find any other shop around—not even food stalls. What was the arrangement for foods for the pilgrims then? *Anna sattras*, dole houses. Many camps provide the pilgrims good quality food free of charge, right from breakfast to dinner. Apart from that, countless families just sit on the ground and cook very simple food in small earthen ovens, offer the food to God, and partake of the prasad.

Where do the pilgrims stay? Most of the pilgrims are flowing. They enter into the Kumbha *kshetra* through any of the several inlets, take a holy bath at the Sangam, offer their prayers, and move away. To facilitate the movement of the crowds the government has constructed eighteen pontoons, floating bridges, which are wide

enough for vehicles to pass over. Apart from the flowing crowds, a good number of pilgrims—mostly from the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan—stay at the Kumbha *kshetra*, especially on the days before the *shahi snans*. They just stay anywhere in the grounds, indifferent to the harsh North Indian winter. It matters little for them where they stay; rather, they consider it a blessing to be able to spend some time in the holy *kshetra*. Many of them spend the nights listening to religious discourses, which go on round the clock, mostly on the Bhagavata and the Ramayana. It is wonderful that at any given moment hundreds, if not thousands, open-to-all discourses are going on at the Kumbha City, each camp vying to attract as many pilgrims as possible. Both the acts of giving religious discourses and listening to them at a holy place are considered extremely meritorious by the Hindus.

Among the crowds one can see countless urban Indians and foreigners, who booked their lodgings in any of the thousands of camps. All





*Ramakrishna Mission camp at the Kumbha Mela of 2013*

the camps have small and big tents for living, makeshift toilets, and dining spaces for the delegates; most of them have bookstalls and *pan-dals*, temporary sheds, for religious discourses too. The camp erected by the Ramakrishna Mission, which is but one of the modest camps, held intra-faith meetings of different denominations belonging to the Sanatana Dharma, treated more than 20,000 patients at its dispensary, distributed 500 blankets to the needy, set up a bookstall and an exhibition, and accommodated hundreds of monks and thousands of devotees during the mela.

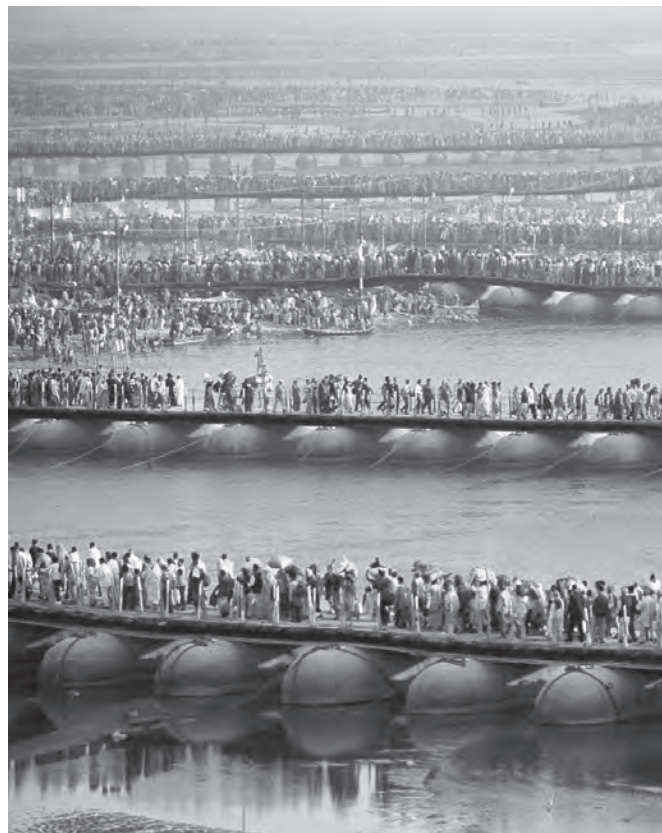
Another surprising thing once you enter the Kumbha *kshetra* is its road system: 156 km of steel-plated roads have been laid down to cover the entire area. The roads are straight, wide, run parallel to each other, and act as an immense grid that sectors the *kshetra*. They are kept clean by many volunteers and government employees who often sprinkle them with water and, frankly speaking, are wider and cleaner than many of the roads of India's metropolitan cities.

The Kumbha Mela is a lesson on how efficient and helpful the police and paramilitary

forces can be. At every crossing, in front of every camp, moving along with every Mahamandaleshvar—virtually everywhere—more than 30,000 police personnel and paramilitary forces were actively providing safety to millions of pilgrims. Above all, they were cordial and extremely cooperative—it seems to be written on their faces that providing security at the Kumbha Mela is as sacred an act as taking a dip at the Sangam. There is no doubt that

one of the major reasons for the Kumbha Mela's success is the efficient and amiable service by the police.

*Pontoon bridges at the Kumbha Mela of 2013*





## The Akharas

One of the greatest attractions of the Kumbha Mela is the different akharas, which are the chief stakeholders of the mela. In fact, it can be said that the Kumbha Mela is a festival of monks belonging to different akharas. What is an akhara? An akhara, which literally means a wrestling place, is like an organization of regimented monks. When India was under Muslim rule the sanniyasins were often attacked by Muslims mullahs and soldiers. To protect themselves, the monks of the Dashanami Sampradaya recruited militant monks from ordinary people as well as ex-soldiers. These militant monks were



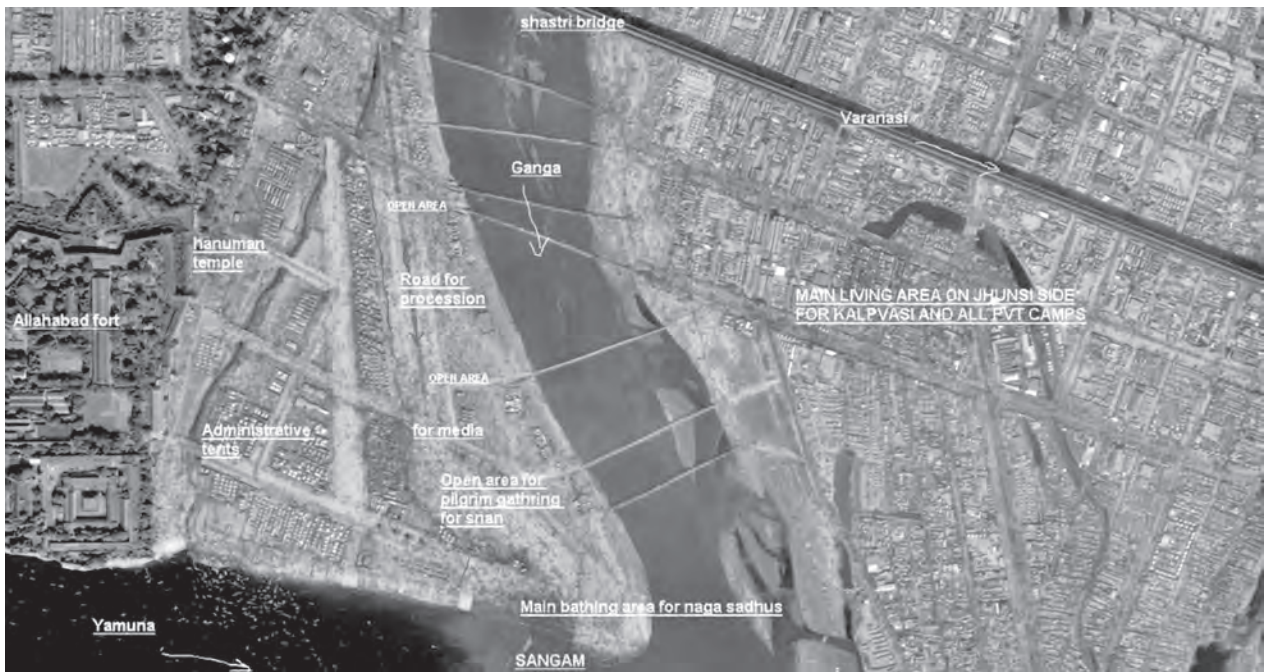
Candidates from an akhara before receiving sanniyasa at the Kumbha Mela of 2013

called Nagas, which means 'naked'—they in fact maintain the tradition of remaining naked even today, with their bodies heavily smeared with ashes; they undertake rigorous physical practices, learn fighting and the use of arms, dwell near temples or in huts, and come before the public only during Kumbha Melas.

In order to take part in the procession for the *shahi snan*, which is a big affair and one of the main attractions of the mela, each monastery belonging to the Dashanami Sampradaya should be affiliated to a particular akhara. The ten orders are: Aranya, Ashrama, Bharati, Giri, Parvata, Puri, Sagara, Sarasvati, Tirtha, and Vana. They have four headquarters in India: Joshi Math in the north, Sringeri in the south, Dwaraka in the west, and Govardhan Math in the east. Under these four headquarters there are several monasteries, called maths or ashramas, that are affiliated to one or the other akharas.

There are seven Shaiva akharas overlapping with the Dashanami Sampradaya of monks: Agni, Atal, Avahan, Bhairava, Juna, Mahanirvani, and Niranjani. The head of an akhara is called the Acharya Mahamandaleshvar, or the Pithadhish; he is a learned monk belonging to





Aerial view of Allahabad taken during the Kumbha Mela of 2013

the Dashanami Sampradaya and is elected by the Mahamandaleshvars from among themselves at the time of a Kumbha Mela. Mahamandaleshvars are the regional heads under an akhara. They too are learned monks having a considerable following of monastic and lay disciples. The akharas assume the greatest role during the Kumbha Melas, as it is for the sake of securing a place in the procession for *shahi snan* that the several Vairagi and Udasin akharas came into existence. Digambar Ani, Nirvani Ani, and Nirmohi Ani are the Vairagi akharas, and Naya and Nirmal are the Udasin akharas. These akharas, unlike the Shaiva ones, do not have Naga or Dashanami sadhus.

Curiously, a non-Naga monk is the head of the akhara of the Naga sadhus. There is an interesting story behind this. Before British rule Naga sadhus used to be the heads of the akharas. But when Christian missionaries started attacking Hindu institutions with their doctrines, including the monasteries, the Nagas found themselves in an awkward position. Nagas, who are supposed to defend the monasteries, were not equipped with the knowledge of the English language to

counter the verbal attacks—they had learnt only military practices to deal with the physical attacks of the Muslims. Therefore, they selected learned Dashanami sadhus as their heads, a practice that is still continued now.

There is a dispute among scholars about the period of origin of the akharas. Some scholars believe that Acharya Shankara created them, while some believe that they are much older. But one thing is sure, that Madhusudan Sarasvati, the great scholar monk who lived in Varanasi in the sixteenth century CE, organized the akharas with the help of Akbar, the great Mughal emperor.

### **The Procession**

As mentioned earlier, one of the main attractions of the Kumbha Mela are the grand and flamboyant processions of the sadhus of all denominations, including the Mahamandaleshvars and their followers, on the days of the *shahi snans*. The day before a *shahi snan* the crowds thicken in the Kumbha *kshetra*, the pontoon bridges are overflowing with the continuous movement of pilgrims, and vehicles are restricted in the area.



The following is a personal account of the *shahi snan* of 10 February 2013. We started from our Ramakrishna Mission camp at 4 a.m. to join the procession of the Mahanirvani akhara—this is the akhara the Ramakrishna Mission joins for the procession. The Mahanirvani akhara goes first in the procession at the Kumbha Melas in Allahabad, whereas the Niranjani akhara is the first at the Kumbha Melas in Haridwar. The order in which the different akharas go in the procession is a serious matter—it is for this position that in the past many battles have been fought among the akharas and thousands of sadhus have been killed. In the Kumbha Mela held in 1796, some 5,000 sadhus of the Shaiva akharas were killed in a fight with the Sikh akharas. Fights between Shaiva and Vaishnava sadhus is also not uncommon. Because of such fighting the British made rules regarding the order of the processions in the four places where Kumbha Melas are held.

During the procession we saw literally millions of people standing by the barricades on both sides of the road. All were jostling to have a darshan of the procession of sadhus; they were shouting ‘Hara Hara Mahadeva’ and offering flowers to the sadhus. As we moved towards the Sangam, the crowd assumed an enormity hard to describe. The yellowish light from thousands of halogen lamps at that early morning hour created a mystic atmosphere.

But when the hundreds of ash-smeared Nagas of the Mahanirvani akhara entered the scene—decorated with flower garlands and some of them on horseback, beating drums, and waving their hands in the name of Mahadeva—the combined tumult of drumbeats, music, and the shouts of the crowds changed the environment. Security forces gave way to the sadhus, as they do not meddle with them during the processions—the police just concentrate on the crowd, which may break the barricades to join the procession.

Other colourful attractions of the processions are the chariots, lorries, and elephants carrying the Mahamandaleshvars, who follow the chariot of the Acharya Mahamandaleshvar situated just behind the Nagas. The chariot of a Mahamandaleshvar is followed by his monastic and lay disciples.

Once we reached the Sangam, we were carried forward by the sea of pilgrims and had only a few seconds to dash into the water, have a dip, and come back. There was a constant fear of bumping into the Nagas, who were at their highest ‘mood’ at the time of the bath. If one collides with them, there is every possibility of being thrown back by them. There was a continuous blowing of whistles by the policemen, who would protect the sadhus and would not disturb them at any cost—it seems the security forces are very conscious that the Kumbha Mela is a festival of sadhus.

### **Kumbha Mela 2013 Facts**

- 18 pontoon bridges and 35,000 public toilets were built for the pilgrims
- 156 km of new roads, made of chequered steel plates, were laid on the riverbank
- 571 km of water pipelines were laid, and 800 km of electric wires and 48 power sub-stations were set up in the mela area
- 125 ration shops and 4 warehouses were opened in the mela area for pilgrims to buy grains, groceries, and vegetables
- 30,000 policemen, 30 police stations, and 72 companies of paramilitary forces were deployed to provide security
- 120 CCTV cameras were installed
- 22 doctors and 120 ambulances were on round-the-clock duty at the 100-bed hospital at the mela
- The Mela generated employment for over 600,000 (6 lakh) people and its revenue was more than 120 billion (12,000 crore) rupees.

—See *The Economic Times*, 14 January 2013



The Mauni Amavasya drew the highest crowd in a single day: more than 30,000,000 (3 crore) people took bath in the Sangam—it was the largest human congregation with a single purpose in recorded history, approximately 90 million (9 crore) pilgrims throughout the mela.<sup>1</sup> According to the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University ‘the millions walked to the Sangam with a purpose. They were resolute in step, but not hurried, they were carefree but cautious. They were happy. They were accommodating. They were joyous.’<sup>2</sup>

### The Faith

What is the secret behind the success of the Kumbha Mela? The arrangement, the security, the planning? All these would have been inadequate to make the Kumbha Mela peaceful and successful, had the crowd not been moved by faith, the simple faith that a dip at the Sangam at the auspicious hour would make one free from samsara, the repeated cycles of birth and death. Moksha is the goal of the pilgrims who come to the Sangam. During the Kumbha Mela the Sangam symbolizes not only the confluence of three sacred rivers, but also the confluence, the melting

pot of different world cultures, the urban and the rural, the old and the modern. Above all, the Kumbha Mela celebrates the human endeavour to go beyond the mundane.

It is the sense of sacredness and other-worldliness that keeps the pilgrims peaceful, focused, and self-disciplined. This simple fact may remain a puzzle to researchers, media, and tourists who do not go deep into the spirit of Hindu culture, a culture that demonstrates that diversities can coexist peacefully, a culture in which celebrations, pilgrimages, and rituals are performed for inner transformation. Inner transformation is a silent process, like the actions of the pilgrims of the Kumbha Mela, who come silently, bathe silently, and move away silently. Amidst the hue and cry, it is the silent prayer of the heart that captures the essence of the Kumbha Mela.

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### References

1. See official statistics by the Government of India at: < [http://kumbhmelaallahabad.gov.in/english/kumbh\\_at\\_glance.html](http://kumbhmelaallahabad.gov.in/english/kumbh_at_glance.html) > accessed 15 March 2013.
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# Bridging Religion and Science

Swami Samarpanananda

IT HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE for many to denounce religion and praise science. Some have even turned this denunciation into a career! The general argument is that religion has no scientific basis and hence is wrong. It matters little if most people know nothing of religion, or for that matter how science truly works.

The modern division between science and religion may be attributed to René Descartes (1596–1650), who first brought in the concept of the divide through his x-axis and y-axis. This divide was later called Cartesian, and it was through this divide that people started looking at matter and mind, God and world, science and religion as separate. The persecution of the scientific yet religious minds, such as Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei by the church, did not help matters. Then one saw Voltaire adding to the growing discord between the two. By the eighteenth century God had become a ‘hypothesis’ for the scientific community.

Swami Vivekananda tried to bridge this divide. It is through his works that one can understand the underlying unity between the two. During his travels in the West, he met not only religious leaders but also some leading scientists and inventors like Nikola Tesla, Hiram Maxim, Lord Kelvin, and others.

## A Closer Look at Religion and Science

The *Mundaka Upanishad* categorizes knowledge into *para vidya*, higher knowledge, and *apara vidya*, lower knowledge. All the sciences belong to *apara vidya*. *Para vidya* is the knowledge that makes a person divine. Can science make one

divine? Going by the present definition of science this is impossible, since science is all about the world, while religion is all about transcending the world. Science teaches us how to turn the wheel of the world; religion teaches us how to stop our inner wheel. Hence, no advancement in science can ever encroach upon the realm of religion.

The crucial difference between the approaches of science and religion lies in science being reductionist—the whole is equal to the sum of its parts—and religion being holistic—the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Who is right is the debate that has been raging since ancient times.

Science depends on models, which help it adjust new data and findings, while religion does not require a scientific model to explain God, though it uses a doctrine to explain the universe—the principal goal of religion is not to explain the universe but to make an individual divine, here and now. It is a fact that religion mixes spiritual truths with religious myths to produce a potable concoction for the masses. But science also mixes facts with scientific myths! Without propagating these myths scientists will fade from public memory, and their funding will stop. Many conclusions of science are still theories, and it is interesting to read ‘decisive’ statements from scientists and non-scientists on these topics.

Scientific theories are developed in two ways. One is by reaching a conclusion through a string of successively derived statements from initial theorems known as axioms. These axioms can be arbitrary, or even absurd, though mutually consistent. When we say that science is born of logic and reasoning, we forget that there are limitations

of the reasoning processes, which are the mechanisms of the proofs and theorems of science. Kurt Gödel (1906–78) mathematically proved the limitations of mathematical reasoning, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) argued that both language and thought have definitive limits. Religion, on the other hand, is never axiomatic, derived, imagined, or thought out. The prophets speak what they experience. Hence, if we declare that the experiences of a pure mind are wrong, then what right have we to consider the perception of an emotionally coloured mind correct? The other method used by scientists is to relate observed phenomena through a theory. In most cases, however, these theories are not laws but mere models, which undergo a change once different kind of data come in. For example, the clockwork universe of Issac Newton was definitive till it was overthrown by Albert Einstein's universe of space-time's fourth dimension and the unity of matter and energy. Today's universe of quantum physics is probabilistic.

How does religion gain its knowledge? There is a near total misconception about this even among scientists. In general, scientists think that religion and religious perception is about extrasensory perception. This idea is completely wrong. Extrasensory perception and all other such hocus-pocus may be anything else, but are not religion. These are mere attention-grabbing antics by the charlatans of religion. Every religion has its roots in the transcendental experience of the major and minor prophets, mystics, and sages. When these great teachers of humanity give up all worldly connections and desires, their minds become pure. It is in such a mind that they experience the light of God. Hinduism describes this state as transcending the mind, as in this state the mind does not function the way we understand it. This transcendental state is known as samadhi, and the knowledge gained in

it is true and free from doubt. Being of the nature of fullness, this knowledge does not evolve. Only when a person has gained, in samadhi, the knowledge of pure Consciousness or God can he or she become truly competent to talk about God.

Hence, while science evolves to better and better models, religious knowledge does not have to evolve because it does not offer theories based on sensory or observed facts. Every religion is firmly entrenched in the intuitive knowledge of God, as described by its prophets and sages, and therefore it develops its explanations backwards from what the prophets and sages experienced in the depths of their meditation.

Scientists raise questions about the superconscious realizations of the sages. Yet scientists forget that many famous inventions and discoveries belong to the realm of either instinct or intuition. For example, much scientific knowledge has come serendipitously, such as that of the dynamite by Alfred Nobel (1833–96) or antibiotics by Alexander Fleming (1881–1995). Discoveries sometimes come through dreams, as that of Friedrich Kekulé's (1829–96) structure of the benzene molecule. Even James Watson's (b.1928) discovery of the DNA's double helix structure was not solely due to logical processes.

Religions in general, and Vedanta in particular, rely on the validity of *pratyaksha*, direct perception, and *anumana*, reasoning, the two mental tools that are essential for scientific growth. Acharya Shankara, the great exponent of Vedanta, repeatedly asserts in his commentaries that the validity of direct perception cannot be negated by even a thousand scriptural utterances. The third method of knowledge is known as *shabda*, knowledge gained through the words of the scriptures. The ideas about God, soul, rebirth, creation, and so on cannot come through direct perception or reasoning, hence one must depend on what the sages have said about these. The sages



had no ulterior motive to mislead people—they had the purest of characters. They were also supremely unselfish and had brilliant minds. The strife between science and religion lies in that science will not accept the scriptures as valid sources of knowledge, nor would religion give up the scriptures. Interestingly, scientists keep swearing by ‘the sages of science’, even when some of these sages are proved wrong.

### Creation, Life, and Death

Creation is a difficult area for science and religion. People want to know where they have come from and where they are going. The most popular answer by religion is that we come from God and go back to God. The popular answer by present-day science is that we are here because of the Big Bang and are going towards infinite expansion for ever.

The Vedas also speak of creation; the ‘Puruṣa Sukta’<sup>1</sup> states that creation came out from the Puruṣa; the ‘Nasadiya Sukta’ (10.129.1–7) takes up the concept of the subtle becoming gross, which then acts on itself—*prana*, the cosmic energy, hammers at *akasha*, the finest primal matter, to produce the universe. Almost every teaching of creation in Hinduism—except the *ajatavada*, the philosophy that there is no creation—can be boiled down to these two hymns.

Swami Vivekananda was fascinated by the concept of creation in the ‘Nasadiya Sukta’, which says: ‘*Anidvatam svadhaya tadekam*: that one thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature’ (10.129.2). Swamiji translates it as ‘it vibrated without vibrations.’<sup>2</sup> From this Swamiji explained the concept of *prana* and *akasha* emerging from a common source, the *dyu loka*, electric sphere, ‘in which the Prana is almost inseparable from Akasha, and you can hardly tell whether Electricity is force or matter’ (5.102). Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) was fascinated by these ideas of Swamiji in 1896, but humanity had to wait for another ten years

for Albert Einstein to work out independently the equivalence of matter and energy in his now famous equation  $E=mc^2$ .

Interestingly, scientists of Einstein’s generation ridiculed him for trying to find out the unifying principle of nature. The same ‘Nasadiya Sukta’ throws up its hands in despair at the impossibility of finding out the truth behind creation and concludes with this question: ‘*Ko addha veda ka iha pravochat kuta ajata kuta iyam visbrishiti*; who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation?’<sup>3</sup>

This inexplicability of creation is a standpoint accepted by every religion and religious philosopher, whose most common answer to the question of creation is that ‘it is God’s will’—or, in other words, ‘I do not know the answer.’ Acharya Shankara says that if the goal of the scriptures had been to describe creation, then all of them would have described exactly the same thing, which is not the case. According to him, the one and only aim of every scripture is to teach human beings their divine nature.

A lot of confusion between science and religion is caused by the concept of a single creation, popular in Semitic religions. What scientists cannot believe is in a God who sets the world in motion at some point of time. According to Biblical calculations, creation took place sometime in 4000 BCE. But is it conceivable that the infinite God will create something that is hopelessly limited in time and space? Well, only the naive can believe this story, and that is why many Western thinkers, including Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), refused to accept this kind of theology for schoolboys. There is a doctrine in Hinduism and Buddhism maintaining the idea of cyclic creation. According to it, an infinite number of universes are created, destroyed, and are existing at any given point of time. The idea of a multiverse and cyclic creation has just started seeping into science.

But one of the main questions placed by scientists is whether religion is rational and consistent at all. The fact is that science assumes axiomatic truths, which may prove false, while religion begins with the words of prophets, which have not been proved wrong. Religion, particularly Vedanta, is consistent and does not suffer from contradictions; it brings meaning to life and is universally applicable. Is this not scientific? To give an example, we can look at the problem of infinity as seen by the Vedic sages who came with the idea of '*Purnasya purnamadaya purnam-evavashishyate*'; taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe) it remains as the infinite (Brahman) itself.'<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, religion has contributed to the *syadvada*, probabilistic outcome, of Jainism, and the *neti-neti*, process of negation, of Vedanta, which are the two powerful tools of reasoning.

Commenting on the role played by religion in the development of science, Freeman Dyson (b.1923) writes:

Western science grew out of Christian theology. It is probably not an accident that modern science grew explosively in Christian Europe and left the rest of the world behind. A thousand years of theological disputes nurtured the habit of analytical thinking that could be applied to the analysis of natural phenomena. On the other hand, the close historical relations between theology and science have caused conflicts between science and Christianity that do not exist between science and other religions.<sup>5</sup>

Various religious philosophies have tried to relate the world of physics and what lies beyond it in the form of metaphysics. One of the popular explanations is by the Sankhya philosophy, according to which the world of experience evolves from Prakriti through *mahat*, cosmic intelligence, and *asmita*, cosmic egoism. But Prakriti is inert, while Purusha is pure Consciousness. How can one know pure Consciousness? Consciousness is eternal and unchangeable. It is beyond

*Scientist's Last Supper, by Nick Farrantello*

*From left to right: Galileo Galilei, Marie Curie, J Robert Oppenheimer, Isaac Newton, Louis Pasteur, Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein, Carl Sagan, Thomas Edison, Aristotle, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Richard Dawkins, and Charles Darwin*



subject, object, or action. It is not the intelligence of the mind—though the mind acts as the best reflector of Consciousness. Everything other than pure Consciousness belongs to the realm of Prakriti, internal and external. Thus the entire world of science belongs to the realm of Prakriti, while metaphysics takes one beyond it to the state of pure Consciousness.

According to science, the intelligence that we see around us is an evolutionary product of matter. Referring to this great chasm between religion and science on this issue Swamiji says:

Every religion has the idea that the universe comes out of intelligence. The theory of God, taking it in its psychological significance, apart from all ideas of personality, is that intelligence is first in the order of creation, and that out of intelligence comes what we call gross matter. Modern philosophers say that intelligence is the last to come. They say that unintelligent things slowly evolve into animals, and from animals into men. They claim that instead of everything coming out of intelligence, intelligence itself is the last to come. Both the religious and the scientific statements, though seeming directly opposed to each other are true. Take an infinite series, A—B—A—B—A—B, etc. The question is—which is first, A or B? If you take the series as A—B, you will say that A is first, but if you take it as B—A, you will say that B is first. It depends upon the way we look at it. Intelligence undergoes modification and becomes the gross matter, this again merges into intelligence, and thus the process goes on. The Sankhyas, and other religionists, put intelligence first, and the series becomes intelligence, then matter. The scientific man puts his finger on matter, and says matter, then intelligence. They both indicate the same chain. Indian philosophy, however, goes beyond both intelligence and matter, and finds a Purusha, or Self, which is beyond intelligence, of which intelligence is but the borrowed light.<sup>6</sup>

This effort at the grand unification between

the discordant notes of religion and science is one of Swamiji's great contribution to humankind.

### **Bridging the Divide**

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* we come across a question that has troubled the human mind for thousands of years: '*Kasmin-nu bhagavo vijñate sarvam idam vijñatam bhavati-iti*; O adorable sir, (what is that thing) which having being known, all this becomes known?'<sup>7</sup> Many wrongly interpret this verse saying that the knower of the Atman becomes *sarvajña*, all-knowing in the worldly sense, but that is not the case. If a person wants to know about all the possible forms that, for example, gold can take, then there cannot be an end to that knowledge, as there would be infinite number of forms. However, if one realizes that many ornaments are made of gold, then by knowing the characteristics of gold, one would know all that is worth knowing about the various ornaments. That is what science is also trying to do. Swamiji says:

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion becomes perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world. One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no farther. This is the goal of all science. All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run.<sup>8</sup>

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# Anuvratas as Social Ethics

Dr Sanjukta Bhattacharyya

THE ESSENTIAL ASPECT of Jain philosophy is its ethics. Jainism, in simple terms, may be defined as a religion of conduct. The followers of Jainism, to be true to the faith, are to undertake certain *vratas*, vows, and diligently observe them. These *vratas* are ahimsa, non-violence; satya, truthfulness; *asteya*, non-stealing; brahmacharya, chaste living; and *aparigraha*, non-acquisition. These vows are followed by both the ascetics and the laity according to their respective capacities. For ascetics these vows are termed *mahavratas*, great vows, and are strictly followed by them. The layperson, on the other hand, follows the *anuvratas*, smaller or lesser vows, while living in society. These vows, which seem odd for householders, are due to Jainism originally being a religion for *sramanas*, ascetics and world-renouncers. Later it was extended to include the householders as well. The lesser vows or *anuvratas* are meant for building a healthy society and rendering life meaningful and purposive. To make the *mahavratas* practical, Jainism encourages the practice of *anuvratas* for everyone. The aim of this paper is to understand the social implications of the ethics embodied in Jainism through the *anuvrata* code of conduct and its relevance in contemporary society.

## Anuvratas and Mahavratas

The most important teaching of Jainism is the path of moksha, salvation. The *triratna*, three jewels—*samyak* darshan, right faith, *samyak* jnana, right knowledge, and *samyak charitra*, right conduct—constitute the path towards salvation. The universal malady of samsara that

every soul suffers can be cured by the *triratna*.

Householders equipped with *samyak* darshan and *samyak* jnana must observe the five *vratas* of ahimsa, satya, *asteya*, brahmacharya, and *aparigraha* in order to have *samyak charitra*. These vows are called *anuvratas* and are applied within the limitations of the lay followers who live an active life in society. When these same *anuvratas* are applied without any limitations become *mahavratas* or codes of moral conduct prescribed by the Jains for the *yatis*, ascetics. From this it is clear that Jain society is comprised of two types of people: the ascetics and the laity. The paths leading to moksha are separate for each of these types, and so are the codes of moral conduct, but the goal is the same.

The Jain Acharya Sri Tulsi, one of the great thinkers of modern times, initiated the moderated doctrine of *anuvratas* as a social movement for laypersons to live a good social life. Householders, by compulsion, could never be as strict in the observance of the vows as the ascetics. The differences in their lifestyles make for variation in the vows to be adopted and observed. Earlier the Jain Acharyas had modified, rather moderated, the *mahavratas* for the layman, naming them *anuvratas*, which were in turn modified to fit in today's world. This was initiated because the needs of the modern world demands new emphasis on old values as well as reorientation of them. Thus *anuvratas* become relevant and practicable in today's social order.

**Ahimsa vrata** • Ahimsa is the pivot on which Jainism's whole philosophy and ethics revolve. Violence is the cause of all the vices,

non-violence of all the virtues. Ahimsa is not a single virtue but a group of virtues. For example, Jainism prohibits ascetics from the killing of even vegetable life, but in its *anuvrata* application for householders this code prohibits the killings of only non-vegetable life. Therefore, ahimsa in such a sense can also be followed by ordinary people, who otherwise would not be able to live in society.

In the beginning ahimsa was defined as to avoid gross cruelty. Later the Jain acharyas narrowed the original and very broad definition of *himsa*, violence, so that farming and killing of the lowest type of creatures was exempted from being counted as *himsa*. When even this was found wanting and impractical, Jain philosophers classified *himsa* into the following four types: *griharambhi himsa*, violence that is unavoidable for leading a domestic life; *udyogi himsa*, violence that is unavoidable in certain professions like in fishing, farming, and so on; *virodhi himsa*, violence that is necessitated in the cause of justice, protection, and self-defence; and *samkalpi himsa*, premeditated intentional violence. Of these only *samkalpi himsa* was prohibited while the others were conditionally permitted for the householders.

**Satya vrata** • Jainism, like other religions, emphasizes speaking the truth as one of its cardinal precepts. Even telling a fictional story to a child counts as a lie. In order to make this vow less rigid and more practicable, Jain theoreticians distinguished between two degrees of pursuance of vows: one strict and ideal meant for ascetics and the other loose and practical meant for householders. Similarly, concessions were made with regard to the vow of telling the truth, for instance, telling a lie became morally permissible if it resulted in greater benefit of living beings.

**Asteya vrata** • This vow for the laity, according to Jainism, has to be interpreted within the

same comprehensive parameters. Due to forgetfulness one may leave a thing behind, but such a thing, which belongs to others, should not be taken, for it amounts to stealing. It also prevents indirect stealing, like instigating others to steal, receiving stolen property, dealing with stolen goods, and so on.

**Brahmacharya vrata** • Refers to chastity or sexual purity in thought, word, and deed. It also means, for householders, to eschew adultery and all related behaviour. It is the gross sexuality exhibited in today's world that has a terrible corrupting influence on people's minds. So staying away from all such overt and covert display is enjoined on the laity.

**Aparigraha vrata** • Refers to *parimita parigraha*, limiting one's attachment to wealth and other worldly possessions. Inordinate longing for worldly goods never results in contentment and real happiness. Hence, householders have to reduce their wants and limit desires if they are to pursue the spiritual path. Thus even in ancient times Jainism prescribed and preached among the laity the ideal of non-consumerism, which is glaring in today's world. Running behind various luxuries and worldly pleasures results in more tension and violence.

### Relevance of the Anuvratas

The analysis of the *anuvratas* clearly points out its relevance in today's world in building up a moral character for the individual and for society. The vow to follow ahimsa means not just non-killing any creature but also not to be abusive and to avoid wrong dealings with others. The ahimsa *vrata* does not permit committing suicide, foeticide, of being aggressive against anybody, or taking part in aggressive agitations. It also means not to have religious intolerance and not to discriminate among persons on the grounds of race, colour, caste, sex, or political

beliefs. Some of the violent activities mentioned above are very common in every society. The whole world is facing the brunt of the most dreadful terrorist attacks that kill innocent lives. The tendency to commit suicide is also increasing daily in this fast consumer-driven society in which many people, after being unable to meet their excessive demands for worldly pleasures, are unable to take the subsequent stress and tension of failures. The contemporary world is seeing the breaking of the restraining social barriers resulting in the old behaving like the young, and young people behaving like old regarding sexual morality and vices. Until and unless one is strengthened by undertaking these vows there is always the chance of being swept by the powerful tides of sexuality and its related problems. Herein it must be said that the *anuvrata* concept is an example of how the ethics embodied in Jainism directs each individual to build up a sane society through the development of one's moral character.

The other implications of the *anuvratas* also inspire and urge people not to indulge in unrighteousness, in illegal business and other kinds of money-earning activities, not to be deceitful, and also to refrain from taking advantage of authority for furthering one's personal ends. The *anuvratas* teach us not to encourage evil behaviour like child abuse or spouse abuse in any form. The *anuvratas* develop self-control among the laity helping avoid intoxicants like alcohol and drugs. These vows are also meant for students and teachers to develop a pure and truthful moral character. Students should refrain from all unfair practices in examinations, and teachers should not assist any student in the adoption of illegal or unethical means. For the politicians the *anuvratas* could help them delink the criminal-politician nexus. Each of the vows enumerated above is of great relevance for the individual and society.

By contextualizing the *vratas* to the needs of contemporary social life, the Jains have showed remarkable flexibility and foresight. The moral prescriptions set for lay people can keep civilization developing into higher and higher levels of existence. They also give dignity to all forms of life and protect the environment of this planet Earth.

The *anuvratas* have been also said to be 'the summary of social ethics', since society is composed of individuals. However, the traffic here is two-way: social behaviour moderating the individual, and the individual in turn securing social development. The gap between selfish and unselfish behaviour that is growing wider and wider everyday is nullified under the *anuvrata* philosophy. The Jain view of life negates the idea of compartmentalization. For every individual activity is like sending out a ripple, as it were, that first touches the family, then the neighbourhood, and keeps on expanding to larger and larger groups till the ripple, strengthened by subsequent contacts, touches every aspect of society.

One should resist evil while living in society. Resistance is presented as an ideal in the *anuvratas*, but this resistance is non-violent. Non-violent resistance implies strength and not weakness on the part of the resistor. One of the greatest examples of non-resistance movement was that of Mahatma Gandhi, which brought down the British rule in India. In more recent times the great non-violent movement started by Martin Luther King gave social liberation to African Americans. Similarly, the movement that brought down the accursed apartheid rule in South Africa was inspired by non-violence.

The *anuvratas* are clear about moderation of the acquisitive instinct of humans, which is perhaps the strongest of all impulses that knows no limit. Acquisitiveness drives all kinds of conflicts on the material plane. It includes lust for power and desire to dominate others—politically,




economically, socially, and culturally. Acquisitiveness can be countered by the *anuvratas*. On the other hand, the *anuvratas* cry a halt to unbridled hedonism that makes humans mere pleasure-seeking beings. These codes constantly remind us that we are travellers on the road to Truth. They become a means for removing hypocrisy in personal and professional life.

The objective of the *anuvratas* is to exhort people universally to observe self-restraint and to establish the values of friendship, unity, peace, and morality. Though the *anuvratas* seem meagre, in them lies a tremendous power that can change the world. A whole socio-philosophical structure can be raised on these practical vows. Many of our actions, however high they may be, are under the control of the ego, which makes all such actions worldly. But one who takes up the *anuvratas* becomes genuinely unselfish and cosmo-centric. Immanuel Kant's idea of moral action or conduct that is 'duty for duty sake' is a partial understanding of the *anuvrata* code of conduct. These *anuvratas* of conduct and actions are moral not only because they do good to others but also because they uplift one's consciousness, leading one from the miseries of the world to spirituality.

### **Dynamism of the Anuvratas**


The *anuvratas* are not passive but dynamic, and to be an *anuvrati* sustained practice of the vows is demanded. Most of the problems in individual lives are due to spiritual alienation. This fractured human psyche is healed with the maintenance of the *anuvratas*, which bring peace and happiness.

A question may arise, whether the moderation of the *mahavratas* into the *anuvratas* for the laity is just a moderation or an ethical compromise. Does the toning down of the *mahavratas* diminish their relevance to some extent? Again, one can also question the basis for such moderation, which is the principle of *anuvrata* itself, and that

if this moderation is so fluid, then these vows may further change in the future. Such questions are superfluous when we remember the Jain concept of the *triratna*, mentioned in the beginning of this paper. In Plato's *The Republic*, Socrates speaks of morality as being the ultimate basis of justice and wisdom. This is also true in the ethics of Jainism, as one finds in the *triratna*—wisdom and knowledge are blended with morality. 'Right conduct' means 'right faith' together with 'right knowledge', blended through the observance of the *anuvratas*. The observance of these vows puts individual and social life on a firm basis and leads people to the highest goal. 

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It matters little what we call that state of unity, but the fact remains that the goal of all knowledge, philosophy, science, religion, and the goal of all endeavour is to find that unity. Consciously or unconsciously we are all moving towards that grand unification. At the more practical level, one has to know that there is no Cartesian divide between matter and mind, God and world, science and religion, and that by opting for a balance between religion and science one can bring a high level of synergy in one's life. 

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# Eternal Words

**Swami Adbhutananda**

**Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**Y**OU SHOULD SPEND at least one whole summer and one winter in a *tirtha*, place of pilgrimage. You can't understand the glory of a holy place unless you stay there for many days. By the grace of the railway companies travel nowadays has become very convenient. There's no difficulty in reaching a holy place. Previously there was no railway. People would make their pilgrimage on foot. Before leaving home they would bid farewell to all. There were tremendous hardships then, therefore people had exceeding faith and devotion as well. Unless you experience hardship, you won't remember God. Just see how people today gleefully arrive at a holy place riding in their cars and drive away in a fuss without developing the slightest trace of faith or devotion. In the name of going on a holy pilgrimage, they go sightseeing, coming back after only a few days' stay. How can they understand the glory of a holy place? Look at this holy city of Kashi. I have seen it before also, what changes have taken place here! Places of pilgrimage have now become the grounds of ruffians. For that reason, honest people don't desire to stay there. While staying at a place of pilgrimage one should hold on to faith and devotion for God. To do otherwise will bring degradation. Many people commit sins in these places; these sins climb onto the necks of the faithless and torment them.

## ***The Company of Sadhus and the Glory of Tirthas***

After a person leaves the body it is better to

perform the funeral rites on the bank of the Ganga. The holy Ganga, just like Kashi, is a great place of pilgrimage. The soul of one whose funeral rites are performed in such places will receive an eternal benefit. Moreover, we are Hindus; such mental impressions are innate in us.

What will happen to the person who has no respect for Dakshineswar? Great is the glory of Dakshineswar. Ma Kali is there, Vishnu is there, the twelve Shivas are there—as well as Mother Ganga. Surely it is a holy place of pilgrimage. Sri Ramakrishna also lived there for so many days performing many austerities! So many sadhus and great spiritual souls have come there! All of them became devotees in that place itself. Verily, everything is there. Just as it is fruitless to write about Sri Krishna without mentioning Vrindavan or Sri Rama without mentioning Ayodhya, nothing can be written about the Master without mentioning Dakshineswar.

You have done a good work bringing your wife and children to see the feet of Viswanath. But when you next come to Kashi, come alone. You should try to do spiritual and devotional practices here for some days. The Master used to say that one should perform sadhana in solitude.

You should go to Dakshineswar or Belur Math on Sundays or other holidays, bringing some fruits and sweets with you. Great inspiration comes if you go to those places. The mind becomes pure. It is indeed good to spend one's holidays and retirement in that way! Can anyone enjoy working all the time?

Kashi is a place for austerities, not for having fun. People come here with good motives, but during their stay, their nature turns bad since they don't do any sadhana. In a holy place of pilgrimage one shouldn't lie or cheat others.

My dear, where will you go if you leave Kashi? Vishwanath and Mother Annapurna are palpably present here! How much trouble and hardship you have to face if you go to Kedar-Badri. Why don't you look at your guru's own life? See how he spent his life in one place. Alright! As you have some desire, go for your trip, then come back. Try to come back again to Kashi itself. If you do spiritual and devotional practices here, with a little effort you can attain the goal. This is the truth. Do spiritual and devotional practices here, you will receive Vishwanath's blessings. What is the need of going to another place? Even if nothing happens here, by seeing a few ochre cloths, one becomes inspired.

Mahaprabhu is a great avatara. He can bestow knowledge and devotion. There is a vast difference between someone like Mahaprabhu staying in a place of pilgrimage, such as Puri, and a worldly person staying in a holy place. It wouldn't make any sense if merely living in a holy place like Puri and eating with all of those assembled there could turn one into a *paramahansa*. So long as one stays in Puri, for that long will the holy impressions stay in one's mind. As soon as worldly people return from Puri, they re-establish the same old distinctions of caste, lineage, prestige, and character.

One must go around for a few days at the beginning visiting sadhus, going from this *tirtha* to that, and seeing the temple deities and the rest. That is good. But one should not forget the ideal. While doing all this one must ensure that one's spiritual mood is not lost. Otherwise, it is better not to go to such places. 'Stay in your own spiritual mood, my mind; do not go to others' homes.'

You should come and visit Kashi. Here everything revolves around the Lord. When you arrive here, you should visit Vishwanath. I am directly experiencing that the world is unreal. Why should I listen to you? Vishwanath alone is real.

At a certain time I had some desire to go around a little [to places of pilgrimage]. The Master said: 'My child, sadhus make their disciples go to the four sacred places [Kedarnath, Badrinarayan, Gangotri, and Jamunotri], then only they shower their grace. Here you don't need to go to the four sacred places. Where shall you go? You are getting prasad here.'

### **Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**

The message of Mahaprabhu was to depend on God, be detached, and eat only food obtained from begging. Only a few of his disciples followed his teachings! Who wants to give up all the fun and enjoyment of the world to live on alms for God-realization? Only the one on whom God's grace has descended can do this.

Feeling the pain of suffering humanity Sri Chaitanyadeva wept saying: 'Worldly-minded people will never be saved at any point of time.' He also said: 'Oh dear! If you want to live in peace, listen to my words.' As long as the people of Bengal and Orissa listened to Chaitanyadeva's instructions, they lived happily. Good people were born during those times. People had no trouble getting their daily meals. Nowadays people have thrown away the teachings of Chaitanya. Moreover, good people are no longer born and so suffering and poverty have increased. Though many die in famines and floods every year, ill-fated humanity's awareness has not increased. The people's karma of this period is dreadful. On account of this they are suffering. See, Chaitanyadeva is an avatara, yet people have discarded his teachings. They say: 'I don't accept him.' Now, who will listen to your or my advice?





*Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu*

Mahaprabhu taught: 'Don't speak about your spiritual practices here and there.' One should keep the subject of one's spiritual practice a secret.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu used to say that when one's mind spontaneously becomes cheerful by seeing a person, it means that that person is a true devotee. And when one's mind spontaneously becomes repulsed on seeing a person, it means that that person is averse to God.

Whether you call him Bhagavan or an avatara of Vishnu, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a great scholar. He himself lived by begging; what is so special about an ordinary man doing so! He was extremely strict about not mixing with women. One who aspires to be a sadhu should study the lives of those great renouncing souls.

### ***Spiritual Teacher and Preacher***

Without receiving God's grace, can anyone become a leader? Only the one whom God has chosen becomes a leader.

By the grace of the avatars many *paramahamsas* are made. Being born in the world, taking a human form, the avatars show us what to do. They teach us: 'Act like this—then you also will make spiritual progress.'

### ***Devotion to One's Parents***

Of all the people in this world, a mother loves the most. If one's wife dies, one can get another wife; but if one's mother dies, one can't get another mother. After wandering here and there and doing different types of work, when one returns and talks to one's mother, joy blossoms in one's heart. One doesn't develop devotion to one's mother unless one renounces worldly happiness. Of course, God's love is better than the

love of the mother.

Sri Krishna is Bhagavan, the giver of liberation, the Master, and the controller of fate. Even Sri Krishna, being born in this world, served and nursed his parents and arranged for their sustenance and maintenance! Oh man, you also be devoted to your parents and worship them. The son who serves in this way is indeed fortunate.

How can people follow dharma? They even feel bothered to have to give money to their own mothers through whose grace they have seen this world, let alone to serve the gods and holy men. How much suffering the mother undertakes for her children! People forget all this.

One who does not obey one's parents will never attain dharma. There are such ungrateful

children that when their parents become sick, they run away and leave them. Perhaps those parents have their own source of income, and their children need not earn money to feed them. Even the Master gave permission to take a job for the sake of one's parents. Not to speak of earning money to feed them, people cannot even take a little trouble to look after their parents! What dharma can such people achieve? They have this problem due to a lack of good karma. If they had good karma or performed austerities, they could understand [the importance of honouring one's parents].

People even forget those who have helped them. One sees those parents who have raised their child with all of their heart and soul. Yet in the end, they are forgotten by their own child. What is the question of remembering others? Surely this is the Kali Yuga.

One who understands the lives of Bhagavan Sri Krishna and Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra will surely maintain trust, faith, and devotion for one's parents. They worshipped their parents in order to teach humanity. Shankaracharya, Buddhadeva, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and all other avatars followed the instructions of their parents. They knew how to show respect, love, and devotion to their parents. The person who claims to have no trust, faith, or devotion for his parents is a beast.

### ***Karma and the Fruits of Karma***

Of course everyone has merits and demerits. Otherwise, why will one take birth? Whatever you do, whether good acts or bad, you must suffer the consequences. That being the case, it is better to perform good acts than bad. Good acts take one closer to God.

Can anyone live without working? God alone has cast us into action. He alone can cut asunder the bonds of our karma if he wishes.

By sitting idly, can the bond of karma ever be severed? Is there any scope for sitting idly? Because we know that everything is his doing alone, we should renounce the pride of doership and simply work.

The ability to absorb other's good qualities is wisdom. God only accepts our merits. Whoever acts in this way is God's servant; he is a man of wisdom.

A person can't even do good work without God's grace. God makes the person on whom he has bestowed his grace perform good work. What will you gain by being jealous? The man who works is surely great. Can a man become great by merely thinking, 'I shall be great like him?' How much suffering and hardship great people had to undergo first—only afterwards they became great. God dislikes a person who remains inactive. This world is a field of action. He will give plenty of food and clothes to the greater worker. It is action which makes one great; again, it is action which makes one petty. Do good and bad exist in people? Action alone makes the critical distinction. For one's actions alone some receive praise and others blame. Those who receive honour for their work are surely blessed. Those who engage in selfless service ask, 'Can we exist without working?' God has himself designed karma—and he himself cuts karma. By karma, karma is nullified. By karma, the mind becomes pure. By karma God can be realized as well.

One who is destined to suffer will surely suffer. What will happen if you obstruct him? You will unnecessarily fall into the poisonous trap of his venomous gaze. Stay on with God—that will surely bring endless good.

God regards one's actions, not one's birth. Having been born into a brahmana family, if a person doesn't perform righteous deeds, what value does it have? Though born in a low-caste

family, if a person performs noble deeds and puts his faith and trust in God, one has a worthy birth.

A human being is bound to do karma. If one does noble deeds, it brings auspiciousness to oneself as well as to others. If one does bad deeds, it brings inauspiciousness to oneself as well as to others.

By karma, one becomes a human; by karma alone, one becomes a god.

Is there any way to know for certain whom God will choose to do his work? 'You bind an elephant in a pool of mud; You make the lame to cross the mountains; Oh Mother, you give some the state of oneness with Brahman; You cause others to fall into degradation. Everything is your wish; You are Mother Tara, the fulfilment of every wish.'

If you call on God wholeheartedly, he makes you understand everything. Instead of indulging in useless chit-chat, engage yourself in talk of God and study of the scriptures—that will surely do you good. You should do what is pleasing to God.

So long as you live, you must engage in action. There is no escaping it. Monks work for God, householders work for the world; yet those who keep their minds on God will be saved.

All people are really the same. They are distinguished only by their work. As much as you offer to God, that much you will receive. If you give four annas, you will receive four; if you give sixteen, you will receive the entire sixteen.

Fear will come upon the person who does wicked deeds. That person will suffer. The mind of a person who does good deeds goes towards God. One attains peace. The noble worker becomes fearless.

People have different paths of karma and its conceptions. However, everyone's aim might be similar. Those who want people's path of karma

and conceptions to be similar are fools.

Joy increases in proportion to one's good works. In the beginning a person finds it bothersome to do good deeds; in time one derives comfort from it. Conversely, while bad deeds may at first bring pleasure, they later bring grief.

Sri Krishna worked through Arjuna. Although he stayed very near, he didn't let Arjuna know that he was God. Sri Krishna said: 'Oh Arjuna! Taking my name for protection, work! Then you will be able to realize me.'

What good will come of merely saying, 'Master!' 'Master!' Perform sadhana. These days everyone is falsely imitating the Master. This is very bad. People do not even pay the least attention to what is genuine.

By seeing a person's work people either trust or distrust him. Why would anyone distrust a person whose actions are noble? It is only when people do evil in the name of doing good that others come to distrust them. If you can give up all types of deceitful thoughts and do good works in a simple honest manner, no one can afford to distrust you. Swamiji used to say: 'No great work is accomplished by fraud.' Seeing Swamiji's work, many have regained their faith in religion. People accept his message with heads bowed and without a murmur, for there is no deception in him.

Sri Krishna said: 'Where can you experience my compassion? I get my work done through anyone and under any circumstances.' What is a person's error? Seeing someone riding a horse-drawn carriage they become jealous. That person is riding in a carriage because he has done good works. What type of bad deeds have you done that have caused your suffering? Again, if you become jealous, you will have to suffer the results of your karma. The guru has said that whatever type of acts you do, you will get the related results.



That desire through which one works to help others creates no bondage. Any desire done for one's own sake is verily bondage.

Does God become anyone's enemy? Yet, if a person becomes extremely oppressive, God will chastise him just as a mother will discipline her child.

There is only joy when one realizes God. It is impossible to express in words what intense joy that is! As much [joy] as one gets, the desire comes for still more. God is the ocean of Bliss! What more shall I say! It cannot be realized unless one does sadhana.

The Master used to say that towards the end sadhus become filled with compassion. Totally forgetting about themselves, they try to do as much good as they can.

In doing work one person's ego is wiped out, while another's increases. It is not possible to perform selfless work without the grace of God.

Can God be realized easily? It requires work. Nothing happens by reading and writing alone. Sadhana is required. This must be felt within one's own heart—it cannot be gotten by listening and reading; it requires pure spiritual work.

I have heard from the guru's lips and from the scriptures that the *jivatman* experiences suffering. Such work needs to be done so that the *jivatman* remains always in joy.


People bring suffering upon themselves through their own actions. They think they will make others suffer, but instead they themselves suffer. They think they are very clever by cheating others. It isn't good to have a conniving mind.

Does disease leave a man just because he becomes a sadhu? His karma will surely cause him to suffer. I haven't done any harm to anyone. I've never even thought of doing so. See how much I have to suffer from disease? *Prarabdha* karma doesn't leave anyone.

(To be continued)

(Continued from page 325)

In his introduction to the commentary on the Gita, Acharya Shankara teaches: 'He [God] appears as if embodied, as if born, and as if favouring people—though by His nature He is birthless, changeless, the Lord of all creatures, eternal, pure, conscious and free.'<sup>14</sup> When God comes as an avatara, he does it as if in disguise, avers Sri Ramakrishna, to see his creation, like a king going around incognito surveying his kingdom. But if we are sincere, Sri Ramakrishna reveals his real nature to us and also reveals that Sanatana Dharma and *sanatana satya*, eternal truth, are not different.

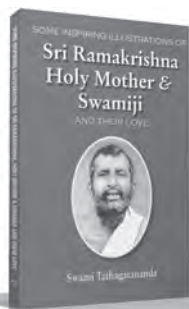
As Sri Ramakrishna 'touched' Swami Vivekananda, the other disciples, and the devotees, and changed their lives for good, similarly, if we are sincere, Sri Ramakrishna too can touch us and reveal to us the way of the avatara. 

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# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## ***Some Inspiring Illustrations of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother & Swamiji and Their Love***

Swami Tathagatananda

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata 700 029.  
Website: [www.sriramakrishna.org](http://www.sriramakrishna.org).  
2011. xii + 159 pp. ₹ 75.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'The great dream is love; we are all going to love and be loved, we are all going to be happy and never meet with misery, but the more we go towards happiness, the more it goes away from us. Thus the world is going on, society goes on, and we, blinded slaves, have to pay for it, without knowing.' The whole world is seeking for love, for it is its nature, but is obtaining misery. When those who give up this seeking material love turn towards divine love, they find the real meaning of life. Every avatara has intensely loved humanity, and this love is what draws people to them.

During Holy Mother's last illness one of her attendants who was moved to tears seeing her suffering resolved not to allow her to give initiation to all and sundry. Coming to know of this the Holy Mother said with a smile: 'Why do you say so? Do you think that the Master came only to take rasagollas?' Prophets and divine incarnations come to relieve the burden of the poor and lowly, of reprehensible and wayward souls. Moreover, the succour their saving acts bring is not confined to the persons immediately present but becomes a powerful beacon of light for generations and generations to come.

Several stirring incidents in the lives of the Holy Trio illustrating their love and compassion for common people and, in some cases, for even 'bad' people are presented in this book. Though most of the material is to be found in

the standard biographies of the Holy Trio, the author has done well in collecting and presenting them in a way that cannot but convince the reader of the great ocean of mercy that we have in Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. In recollecting their mercy we regain our strength and courage to face the inner battle.

*Br Shantichaitanya*

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama  
Vrindavan



## ***The Labyrinth of Solitude***

K D Prithipaul

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, P O Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com). 2012. Part I, xvi + 546 pp; Part II, vii + 671 pp. ₹ 3,000.

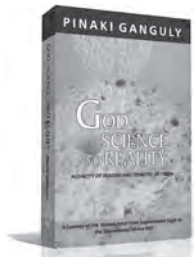
Every sadhaka has to travel a long silent road alone, with only dharma as guide, in order to realize the ultimate Truth. No failures should thwart one's progress, but one must muster heroic courage to keep moving. Somewhere down the road one realizes that all the joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures of life have been part of the ontological freedom one seeks. This 'labyrinth of solitude' is a necessity through which one must traverse before one can reach the Truth.

Bred in an intellectual and practising tradition, the author explores layers of dharma, with its meanings and influences, from the ancient to the present. He juxtaposes and contextualizes this concept based on the Mahabharata and relates it to the problems of life vis-à-vis social strata. The work analyses philosophical concepts, readings, and rereadings in a novel way. The sceptre and solace of dharma are depicted and the political

interpretation in the Indian Constitution is traced. The solitude of dharma has indeed been brought out from the labyrinth of the Mahabharata. This one-stop solution to the anomalies in defining dharma would prove valuable to academics and general readers alike.

There are a total of forty-nine chapters in the two volumes. The learned author, after a long career of teaching philosophy and religion, has turned to writing and has many books to his credit.

Swami Narasimhananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



### **God, Science, and Reality**

Pinaki Ganguly

Books Way, 86A College Street  
(YMCA Building), Kolkata 700 073.  
Website: [www.booksway.in](http://www.booksway.in). 2012.  
xxiii + 279 pp. ₹ 495.

**T**his book is a religio-philosophic-scientific brew concocted through a blend of five ingredients: atheistic scepticism, scientific questioning, mathematical logic, philosophic enquiry, and faith-bound spiritual quest. The overriding flavour of the mix is, however, a faith-bound spiritual quest grounded in ancient wisdom. The majority of today's books normally deal with their themes in a monologue style, with the authors articulating their thoughts in an uninterrupted manner and with no interlocutor to question and doubt. *Science, Religion, and Reality* is a refreshing departure from the usual monologue style presentation of thoughts. It is cast in the dramatic setting of an intellectual debate and discussion with the main speaker interacting with other four learned interlocutors on a variety of subjects. The participants in the scholarly and wide-ranging discussion are an atheist, a scientist, a mathematician, a philosopher, and a sage possessing ancient oriental wisdom. The sage leads and almost dominates the lively discussions through his masterly expositions and convincing clarifications. Absorbing, the book is a virtual cauldron of clashing ideas, fermenting thoughts, and bold speculations.

The Prologue offers a peek into the exciting vistas of knowledge ready to unfold. The author makes it clear that by the term 'God' in the title he means 'spirituality'. Is science and spirituality perpetually at loggerheads and working at cross-purposes? Or are they partners in the common adventure of unveiling the face of Reality, albeit with different methods? The author says: 'I got introduced to Sanskrit verb-based semantics which I used as a tool to integrate Science and Spirituality. It was then that I understood that both had combined to unveil the face of reality. Ancient wisdom and modern methods have to hold each other's hands' (4).

There are six major sections, which have sub-sections that deal with the various questions that come up during the course of the conversations. The overall flow of reason is in the form of a nested circle. The six major sections are: 'The Atheist's God', 'Nature-Man-Science', 'Mechanism of Knowledge', 'Architecture of Religion', 'The Master's Plan', and 'The Light of Perfection'. Another key feature that enhances the value of the book is the author's liberal use of diagrams to clarify essential points. For example, the six major sections of the book are presented in the form of six smaller circles that themselves make, by their close juxtaposition to each other, a bigger circle called 'Circle of Reason'. A brief chapter entitled 'Confluence at Ganges' may be considered an epilogue. The five doughty debaters disperse with mental clarity and spiritual illumination, buoyed up by the sage's suggestion to continue later on their penetrating analysis and discussions on the banks of the Ganges.

Pinaki Ganguly is a scholar of scientific as well as religious inclinations. The book is the excellent result of his rigorous and prolonged research and profound meditation on the ultimate issues of existence, that is of 'God, Light, Freedom, and Immortality', to borrow Sri Aurobindo's intuitive and envisioned terms. The bibliography, glossary of Sanskrit terms, and index add to the value of the book. *God, Science, and Reality* is a gold mine of wisdom and a must-read for modern people seeking transcendental knowledge.

N Hariharan  
Madurai



# REPORTS

## **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda**

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bangalore:** Vivekananda Ratha Yatra (procession with Vivekananda carriage), which will cover all the districts in Karnataka, was launched on 13 March 2013; nearly 1,500 people attended the public meeting organized on this occasion. **Boston (USA):** On 8 March the centre organized a programme in Sever Hall at Harvard, the same room in which Swamiji had lectured on Vedanta Philosophy in May 1894. The programme included a slideshow on Swamiji, music, a scholarly panel discussion, and a general discussion. A good number of people attended the programme. **Chengalpattu:** Processions, devotional music,

*Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at the Vivekanandar Illam*



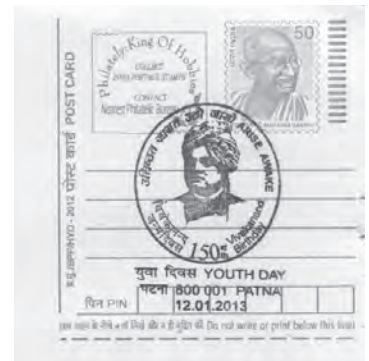
*Programme in Sever Hall at Harvard University*

and film shows on Swamiji at Athivakkam, Devadhur, Perampakkam, Thiruvilachery, Maruvalam, Kezhakandai, Vasandhawadi, Vilagam, Ozhaveti, and Sidhandimandapam on 23 and 24 February and 2, 3, 8, 9, 16, 17, 23 and 24 March respectively. **Chennai Math:** Selvi J Jayalalitha, Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu, inaugurated the yearlong statewide celebration of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary at Vivekanandar Illam on 27 February; she also laid the foundation stone for the proposed Vivekananda Cultural Centre on the vacant land adjacent to Vivekanandar Illam and released a Tamil book containing pictures of Swamiji. Besides, the centre has published 150 e-books in Vedanta E-books App ([www.vedantaebooks.org](http://www.vedantaebooks.org)) and has made available the iPad versions of *The Vedanta Kesari* and *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*. **Delhi:** A play on Swamiji on 29 March, attended by about 400 people, and a programme of devotional songs by a renowned classical singer on 31 March, attended by nearly 350 people. **Dinajpur (Bangladesh):** A devotees' conference and a public meeting in the ashrama premises on 15 March, attended by 300 and 400 devotees respectively. Meetings at five different places in Dinajpur district, attended by nearly 10,000 persons. **Dhaka**

(Bangladesh): The yearlong celebration was inaugurated on 14 March by Sri Promod Mankin, Deputy Minister, Social Welfare, Bangladesh. The three-day programme held from 14 to 16 March comprised discourses by eminent persons, devotional songs, and cultural shows. **Hyderabad:** Seminars on 'Management and Leadership Lessons from Swami Vivekananda' on 9 and 23 March, attended by about 1,200 youths and professionals. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** On 1 March Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released the book *Swami Vivekananda: New Perspectives*, an anthology on Swamiji brought out by the centre. **Kanchipuram:** Speeches and cultural competitions in 7 schools and 7 colleges on 15, 19, 22, 26 and 31 January, 1, 2 and 13 February, and 1, 2 and 8 March, attended altogether by about 9,000 students. **Kankurgachhi:** A seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda and Seva Dharma' on 24 March, in which 35 eminent doctors of Kolkata participated; nearly 400 people attended the seminar. **Limbdi:** Talks on the life and teachings of Swamiji at 7 schools, attended by nearly 6,000 students in all. **Lucknow:** A training workshop on 'Youth Counselling and Positive Thinking' as well as an awareness programme from 23 to 25 March. 30 counsellors from 7 states participated in the training workshop and nearly 300 parents, teachers, and interested youths attended the awareness programme. **Mauritius:** A programme comprising devotional songs, talks, and a cultural show in a village on 23 March, attended by nearly 400 people. **Porbandar:** A retreat on 24 February, attended by about 150 devotees, and a seminar on positive thinking on 25 February, attended by nearly 200 youths. **Rajkot:** 14 youth programmes in Upleta and Bhavnagar on the arrival of 'Vivekananda Rath' at those places; about 4,500 students attended the programmes.

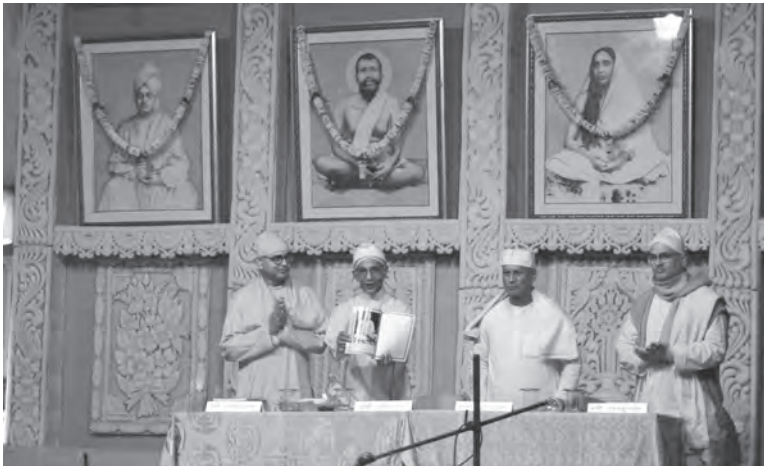
**Ranchi Sanatorium:** A seven-day national integration camp for youths from 23 February to 1 March, in which 160 youths from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal participated. **Salem:** Discourses on Swamiji from 22 to 24 February and from 15 to 17 March in the ashrama premises. Programmes in 14 rural schools of Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu from 6 to 13 March, attended by 2141 students. **Sargachhi:** Cricket tournament from 3 February to 10 March, in which 16 teams participated. **Sydney (Australia):** A programme comprising worship, speeches, an interfaith conference, and devotional music at Brisbane on 9 March, attended by around 200 people. **Tiruvalla:** Speeches and cultural competitions in 2 colleges and 4 schools in February and March, attended by about 3,000 students.

The Bihar Circle of India Post has paid a philatelic tribute by issuing a special pictorial cancellation seal. The seal was conceived and designed by Lalit Kumar Mishra and bears the picture of Swamiji and his call 'Arise Awake'.



### News from Branch Centres

**Ramakrishna Math, Sikra-Kulingram,** celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj from 9 to 12 February. Special worship, homa, public meetings, and cultural programmes were part of the four-day celebration. On 9 February Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released a pictorial biography of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj



*Swami Suhitananda releasing a pictorial biography of Swami Brahmananda at Sikra-Kulingram*

and a commemorative volume. About 18,000 devotees attended the celebrations. Besides, a youth convention was held on 11 February, in which 2,075 students took part.

On the occasion of the Purna Kumbha Mela **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad**, organized a camp at Kumbha Nagari (temporary city on the banks of the Sangam) from 12 January to 26 February. Devotional songs and discourses were held daily at the shrine-cum-satsang pandal. A conference of monks of various Hindu denominations was held from 7 to 9 February, which was attended by about 6,000 people. More than one lakh people visited the exhibition on the Holy Trio and about 19,500 patients were treated in the medical camp. A commemorative souvenir was also brought out by the ashrama.

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed lecture hall at **Ramakrishna Math, Vadodara**, on 30 March, the birthday of Swami Yoganandaji Maharaj.

### **Achievements**

Biswajit Ghosal, Bulet Mandal, Gopal Panigrahi, Joydeep Gorai, and Subrata Gayen, all students of the **Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math**, were awarded gold medals for securing all-India

first ranks in Purva Madhyama (equivalent to class 10) and Uttara Madhyama (equivalent to class 12) examinations conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Sri Pallam Raju, Union Minister, Human Resource Development, handed over the medals in the convocation of the Sansthan at New Delhi on 21 January 2013.

### **Relief**

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Belgharia**: 256 dhotis and 430 lungis on 19 February, and 320 saris, 320 lungis, and 730 children's garments on 29 March. **Guwahati**: 300 saris, 50 dhotis, and 150 tins (total 45 kg) of protein powder during December-January 2013. **Nagpur**: 120 saris, 30 chaddars, 30 towels, and 300 soap bars on 19 March. **New York Vedanta Society (USA)**: Garments like jackets, sweaters, coats, pants, and t-shirts to 500 homeless people; various foodstuffs like cereals, vegetables, soup, sugar, flour, and other necessary items like soap, detergent, and shampoo to 250 homeless people in New York City on 24 March. **Ponnampet**: 70 plastic sheets, 40 steel plates, and 40 steel tumblers during August-September 2012.

**Drought Relief** • In the wake of the severe drought in certain parts of Maharashtra, **Pune** centre supplied 216,000 l of drinking water among 12,735 people of 9 villages in Ahmednagar district from 25 to 31 March.

**Winter Relief** • 2442 blankets were distributed to needy people through the following centres. **Alahabad**: 500, 12 January to 26 February; **Almora**: 275, 4 January to 12 February; **Baranagar Mission**: 500, 13 November to 25 March; **Belgharia**: 320, 29 March; **Guwahati**: 150, December-January 2013; **Mysore**: 25, 9 March; **Narendrapur**: 400, 27 November to 16 February 2013; **Ponnampet**: 272, August to September 2012. Moreover, **Almora** centre distributed 151 sweaters and 2 woollen chaddars to the needy from 4 January to 12 February. 